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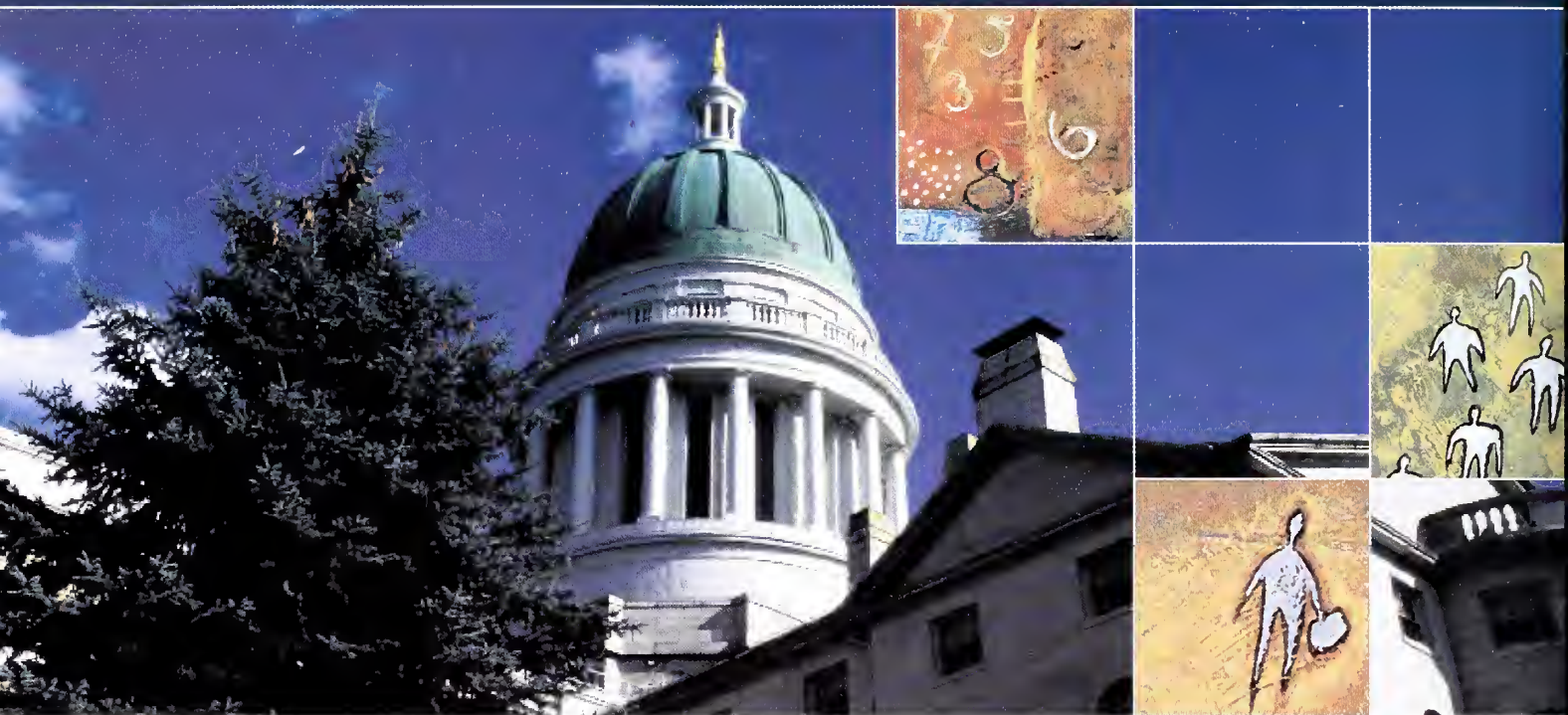
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over money and politics

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True or not, I imagine Powell sitting each night in his hotel room in downtown Springfield, out of the sights of tax agents, uncrinkling and recounting 10s

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against a charge of public graft.

In fairness, there is precedent for this. Another former Republican governor was acquitted on tax evasion charges that also involved wads of cash. William Stratton, tried in 1963, also argued that money arrived unsolicited, stuffed into Christmas and birthday cards. David

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We miss something if we look only to the scope of graft or the means of acquiring it

by Peggy Boyer Long

How much is enough? A few steak dinners? First-class flights to better fairways? A million or more in undeclared cash? What if even that is not enough? What if there is no enough?

Randy "Duke" Cunningham needed at least \$2.4 million, according to recent news accounts. We'll never know how much more he might have required. The California Republican was forced to resign his seat in the U.S. House after fessing up to bribery. Still, Cunningham lived, as my grandmother would say, pretty high on the hog while it lasted. He managed to get defense contractors to bankroll a lifestyle that is unimaginable on a public salary.

Next to him, Paul Powell was little more than a church mouse. Not that the late Illinois secretary of state couldn't have matched Cunningham dollar for dollar. But Powell was raised on some basic Midwestern values my grandmother could understand. He was not so much a spender as a hoarder. No putting on airs in front of the neighbors for him. Then, too, in his day, a chit was stored in the head and sealed on a shake. And settled, whenever possible, in cash.

True or not, I imagine Powell sitting each night in his hotel room in downtown Springfield, out of the sights of tax agents, uncrinkling and recounting 10s

*"To me avarice seems
not so much a vice,
as a deplorable
piece of madness."*

Sir Thomas Browne

and 20s before storing them lovingly in a cardboard box. He left nearly a million of those dollars unspent. But never mind, the getting and the counting may have been satisfaction enough. We'll never know. The Democrat was still at the top of his game when he died in 1970.

What would be enough? Jetting off to tee up in Scotland? Being seen with wads of cash? Calculating the mean value of personal and political tribute?

Which brings us to George Ryan, the bookkeeper. Illinois' former Republican governor was charged in 2003 with tax fraud and with getting benefits for his family and himself, including free vacations, mostly during his tenure as secretary of state. As we send this to press, we don't know what the jury will decide in his long-running federal trial.

But we do know Ryan was famous for

carrying wads of cash, and that he seldom made withdrawals from his personal account. And we know (his lawyers told us) that each Christmas Ryan's employees put together a bundle of money that came to as much as \$4,000. We also know that Ryan had a compulsion to track these tributes in what amounted to a handwritten ledger. And that he wrote checks (prosecutors told us) from his campaign kitty for at least one of his workers, a janitor. At deadline, prosecutors had fixed no interpretation to this exchange. But it's fair to say Ryan received cash gifts that are hard to trace, while his janitor got larger amounts in a form that is easy to trace.

We know Ryan is creative. As are his lawyers. The Christmas giving "tradition" by loyal employees was entered as a plausible explanation for those wads of cash. And how could anyone fully gauge the fallout from this strategy? What could be, and was, seen as personal greed was a key defense against a charge of public graft.

In fairness, there is precedent for this. Another former Republican governor was acquitted on tax evasion charges that also involved wads of cash. William Stratton, tried in 1963, also argued that money arrived unsolicited, stuffed into Christmas and birthday cards. David

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Kenney wrote in *A Political Passage: The Career of Stratton of Illinois* that the late governor said he got a thousand or two a year, "some from people [we had] never even heard of."

Apparently, money was pressed on him at every turn. Kenney wrote that John W. Lewis, the state House speaker, finished his turn as a defense witness by offering \$50 "to do with as he sees fit." Kenney noted: "Taken by surprise (perhaps), Stratton asked, 'Your honor, may I have your permission to accept this? ... It's my 51st birthday.' Judge Will smiled and said, 'I don't control contributions.'" After U.S. Sen. Everett Dirksen argued politicians need to keep up appearances, meaning new dresses for the wife and fancy lodging, the jury found Stratton not guilty.

Times have changed. But the game, and the need that drives it, hasn't. This poses endless challenges to reformers, as well as prosecutors. Over the years, Illinois has made strides in putting limits on the most egregious "perks" that attend political power. We detailed that progress in last month's issue. And, as we report in this issue, congressional reformers want to do the same.

This is necessary work. And some admirable folks continue to do the heavy lifting. Barack Obama pushed ethics reform in the Illinois legislature before he went off to the U.S. Senate and agreed to head Democratic efforts

in Congress. Among others, Republican state Sen. Kirk Dillard is still at it back here. As is Kent Redfield, a political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield, and Cindi Canary of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform.

But we miss something if we look only to the scope of graft or the means of acquiring it. A 17th-century English doctor was on to this. Sir Thomas Browne wrote essays reflecting on the human condition. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* turned to him for this entry: "To me avarice seems not so much a vice, as a deplorable piece of madness."

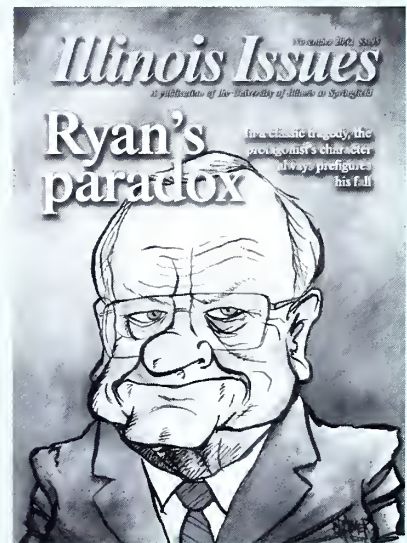
In this light, we might reconsider Orville Hodge. The Republican embezzled a couple of million dollars as state auditor of public accounts. It's unlikely he would have stopped on his own. But it's also unlikely that he looted the treasury simply because he could. Perhaps he believed he was entitled. And perhaps he was filling some endless hole in himself.

Everett Dirksen is credited with saying, "a billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money." He was referring to public budgeting. But the bottom line on political greed never adds up. It is never enough. □

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

George Ryan's political career

He was, David McKinney wrote in *Illinois Issues*, "Paralyzed by scandal, yet one of the most active Illinois governors in recent memory." And that was just one paradox in the public life of the Kankakee Republican. Ryan served one term, which ended in January 2003 with federal prosecutors close on his heels. A jury may have decided his fate by the time you read this. McKinney's biography of Ryan, published in *Illinois Issues*' November 2002 edition, offers a balanced picture of the state's 39th governor. Go to <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. Click on the News page, where we also provide the evidentiary proffer for *United States of America v. Lawrence Warner and George H. Ryan, Sr.*



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Bethany Carson



Illinois seniors may have fewer health care choices next year, which could be what they want

by Bethany Carson

Consumers want options when it comes to affordable health care. There are plenty under the federal government's new prescription drug insurance program, though there may be too many. And those options might not be the ones consumers want.

But if frustration prevents older and disabled Illinoisans from signing up for a Medicare Part D plan in the next few weeks, they may have fewer options in the near future.

The federal government expanded the Medicare program in January, offering prescription drug coverage to seniors and disabled people through private insurance companies. Supporters say private companies will compete for business by offering affordable drug plans that pay for a wide range of medications. They believe competition will drive down drug prices and save money for the federal government and 43 million Americans.

Illinoisans have until May 15 to choose from about 45 plans offered by more than a dozen insurance companies. Yet the Medicare Rights Center, a New York-based consumer watchdog group, says the federal program offers too many options and not enough information to make useful comparisons.

Before people started signing up last fall, a federal official urged families to compare plans by focusing on

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three factors: cost, coverage and convenience. Mark McClellan, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, says consumers are most worried about finding a drug plan that costs them little out of their own pockets, covers the drugs they need and is accepted by their local pharmacists.

Comparing apples to apples, however, is difficult, according to analyst Jack Hoadley. He's a research professor at the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and has testified to Congress about Medicare Part D.

He says the program lacks standard options because each insurance plan has its own set of rules about which drugs it covers. Some also require customers to try cheaper alternatives of a drug before the insurance pays for a refill of a more expensive, brand-name version.

Although seniors can get help from specially trained social service agencies and from Medicare resources, Hoadley says the details of the program are too confusing. As a result, people don't have a good sense about which plans are best for them.

"What Congress tried to do was create a private market [for prescription drug insurance]," he says. "But we've created one that fails some of the market tests. People don't have all the information they need to make good choices."

Frustration could prevent some people from making a choice at all.

Nationwide, only about half of the 43 million eligible people had enrolled by mid-January, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. About 8 million picked a plan themselves. Another 6 million low-income people were automatically assigned to a plan by the time the benefit started.

In all, the government projected nearly 30 million people would sign up this year. If enrollment sags, those who already selected a plan could have a new set of choices to make next year.

According to Hoadley, drug plans that

fail to attract enough business to cover their costs might not be around next year. That means some seniors and disabled people would have to find new plans, opening the door for more questions and concerns.

In addition, insurance companies could start finding ways to lower their costs. In the second or third year of the program, Hoadley believes companies could tighten their belts even more and stop covering some of the expensive drugs altogether.

The potential good news is that as competition weeds out the weaker players Illinoisans could have fewer plans to consider. At the same time, the surviving plans that pick up additional customers could gain more leverage in negotiating lower drug prices.

One opponent of Medicare changes says that won't happen. Ralph Martire, executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability in Chicago, says insurance companies won't secure lower drug prices because the health care industry lacks fundamental elements of a competitive market. Like gasoline, health care is essential, he says, so consumers don't have a true ability to decide whether to buy a drug at a particular price. They have to buy their drugs to stay healthy.

Martire says he does agree the drug plans could save money for themselves and for the federal government, but not because they gain power to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies. Rather, they could save money because they make people jump through hoops and discourage them from using the prescription drug insurance in the first place.

"The more hurdles we put into place, the more we increase costs, the more we drive low-income and middle-income families to not seek medical services," he says. "We're going to save money because less people are going to receive treatment, but the prices we're going to pay for the drugs are going to [continue to increase]."

Hoadley says it's too soon to know whether drug companies are succeeding in lowering drug prices.

Further, he suggests that if the private sector fails to send signals to consumers

The potential good news is that as competition weeds out the weaker players Illinoisans could have fewer plans to consider. At the same time, the surviving plans that pick up additional customers could gain more leverage in negotiating lower drug prices.

about which plans are most viable, then Congress might be charged with drafting new legislation to make the Medicare program more attractive.

A spokesperson for U.S. Rep. John Shimkus, a Collinsville Republican, also says it's too early to make that call. "Judging the program in the first month and a half, saying it's doomed, is certainly not the approach we would take," says Mo Zilly, Shimkus' legislative director. "There may need to be some tweaking of the program, and Congress has the ability to do that."

For instance, she says, "We support, and John has fought for, making sure we have any willing pharmacy fill these prescriptions. We don't want people to be forced into mail order, and we want them to have a choice between plans."

Another federal lawmaker says the Medicare program should offer an entirely different choice. U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, a Springfield Democrat, says seniors should be able to decide whether to participate in a basic, national drug program or to opt out for an alternative insurance plan in the private sector.

As is, he calls Medicare Part D "an unsalvageable fiasco" with "built-in unfairness" because seniors have trouble getting the most up-to-date information. Even if some seniors use the Internet or call the 1-800-MEDICARE hotline, he says, they cannot make informed decisions because details can change the next day.

ILLINOIS ENROLLMENT:

Illinois has a total of 1.7 million Medicare-eligible people this year. By mid-January, about half of them had enrolled. They include:

251,000 people who chose to enroll in a prescription drug plan;

67,000 people who chose to sign up for a Medicare Advantage plan that also covers doctors' visits and hospital stays;

248,000 people who qualified for Medicare and Medicaid and were automatically enrolled in a plan.

SOURCE: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

He says consumers also have lost bargaining power because they no longer have one drug program that negotiates as a single, nationwide unit on their behalf.

"I think Medicare ought to bargain with the pharmaceutical companies," Durbin says. "It's bulk discount. [Think of] Medicare: A potential of 40 million customers. What pharmaceutical company would opt out? They won't. They will bargain."

Hoadley says offering fewer options also would be a good thing. He, too, favors a more standardized program similar to former President Bill Clinton's proposal for a single plan per region, rather than 45 different ones. The government could compromise, he says, by accepting fewer bids from insurance companies who want to participate.

Arriving at a compromise will be difficult, however, given that health care is often caught up in partisan politics.

Durbin says he has proposed such changes as extending the time to enroll until the end of the year and allowing seniors to opt out of a plan without penalty. Yet he urges seniors to make a decision based on the current options before May 15, as major legislative changes are unlikely.

Hoadley agrees. "So much depends on the political winds, as well as having more time to see how this plays out." □

Bethany Carson can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

NATURE STUDY

Winter's swan song sends waterfowl north after Illinois respite

About 100 trumpeter swans that wintered at an abandoned southern Illinois coal mine were expected to migrate northward by the first of this month. That might not seem miraculous, but just a few decades ago noncaptive trumpeter swans were nonexistent in the Midwest.

Researchers at Southern Illinois University Carbondale observed 109 of the tall snow-white birds at the site of the former Burning Star No. 5 mine, which is just east of DeSoto and includes more than 8,000 acres of tall grass, ponds, fields and woods.

The swans, which get their name from the horn-like call they make as they fly in "V" formation, were hunted to extinction in the Midwest, and by 1932 only 69 were counted in the continental

United States. But restoration programs have brought the trumpeters' numbers

back up. A few came to the DeSoto area in the early 1990s, and their numbers have since grown.

Michael Eichholz, an assistant zoology professor at SIUC who specializes in migratory birds, received a \$117,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to study the health of the trumpeter swans. Wetlands — their natural food source — have dwindled by 85 percent in Illinois. Since the birds' reintroduction to the Midwest, they have lived off winter wheat left after harvest and other "farm waste grains." Eichholz's study is expected to show whether the birds can thrive on a diet that isn't based on underwater vegetation. He's working with state biologists in Wisconsin, where the swans nest and breed.

Eichholz and his students also are monitoring trumpeter swan populations in Missouri across from Alton and at Universal Mine in Vermillion County, Ind.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney



The trumpeter swan's wingspan can extend beyond 7 feet. Most stand about 4 feet tall.

Photographs by Russell Bailey, courtesy of Southern Illinois University Carbondale



SIUC graduate student Dana Varner and zoologist Michael Eichholz monitor trumpeter swans at a former coal mining site near DeSoto.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

ENVIRONMENT VS. ECONOMICS

Plan to cut mercury might not be cost-effective

Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposal to reduce mercury emissions because of health concerns could prove too costly for Illinois' coal-powered utilities, company officials argue.

In his State of the State address, the governor set standards that would exceed federal guidelines established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Under his plan, Illinois' coal-fired power plants would be required to cut mercury emissions by 90 percent in three years instead of 47 percent by 2010, as the U.S. EPA intends.

"Washington's solution simply isn't good enough," Blagojevich said in January. "That's literally a half-measure."

Mercury, which is released during the coal-burning process, falls into streams and lakes where it is absorbed by fish as methylmercury, a toxin that has been linked to developmental disabilities. Pregnant women and young children are advised to eat a limited amount of some fish. And the Illinois Department of Public Health has issued a fish advisory for all bodies of water in the state. Still, studies offer conflicting evidence on the health problems caused by various levels of mercury.

Nevertheless, Howard Lerner, executive director of the Environmental Law and Policy Center, says it's a "smart" policy to "prevent children's health problems [now] rather than paying for the costs later."

Opponents say the governor's plan would be costly and difficult to achieve under the timeline proposed. Phil Gonet, president of the Illinois Coal Association, compares removing mercury from coal to filling the Houston Astrodome with white pingpong balls then putting 19 yellow balls in the mixture. "The challenge is to find those 19 pingpong balls and take 90 percent of those yellow balls out of there."

Illinois Energy Association President Jim Monk says the governor's goal is possible, but the utility companies he represents favor the federal rule because mercury-reduction technology is still under development. He says there's also no guarantee vendors who sell the pollution control equipment will be able to meet the reduced emission standards by 2009.

"If the rule becomes effective as proposed, then there is going to be pretty severe repercussions in terms of costs and potential problems with the reliability of the [power] grid," Monk says. "Some plants won't be economically viable to keep running. That, in itself, will cause economic ripples in the state."

Gonet says Illinois' coal-fired power plants also are likely to continue purchasing coal from other states, as they have done since the Clean Air Act of 1990. Utility companies would have to spend more to filter out toxins in addition to mercury, especially sulfur, from Illinois coal.

While the proposed rule may seem strict, the Illinois EPA would allow some flexibility. Jim Ross, manager of the agency's division of Air Pollution Control, says plants could receive temporary extensions if they propose a strategy to meet the requirements. Older boilers at plants would not be required to meet the guidelines if owners plan to replace them with more efficient models.

The plan, drafted in February by the Illinois EPA, with input from utility stakeholders, must be approved by the Illinois Pollution Control Board by this summer. Then the legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules would need to approve it in time to meet the federal EPA's November deadline to meet national standards.

Jasmine Washington

QUOTABLE

“To be very honest with you, I was a Democrat. Under [Republican governors] Thompson, Edgar and Ryan, it didn't make a difference — if you were doing the job.”

Fired Illinois warden Sandra Brown-Kibby as quoted by the Chicago Tribune in its report about Gov. Rod Blagojevich's successful defense of a lawsuit brought by former Illinois prison officials protesting their dismissals. Their complaint: Blagojevich had promised state workers' jobs would be safe as long as they performed ably. A Blagojevich defense lawyer told the court that the promise was never binding because it was only "classic political puffery," according to the Tribune.

Working Illinoisans hit by harder times

Economic gains made by Illinois workers in the booming 1990s have nearly disappeared, according to the *State of Working Illinois 2005*, a report released recently by Northern Illinois University in DeKalb.

The research was done by Northern's Regional Development Institute, the Office for Social Policy Research and the Chicago-based Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. The Joyce Foundation funded the project.

"When you analyze the economic data for the last 15 years, it is as if the 1990s boom economy never happened," Robert Gleeson, associate director of the institute and director of the Center for Governmental Studies, stated in a release. "Since 2000, we have essentially backtracked. Based upon the measure of median household income, adjusted for inflation, the buying power of the average family in Illinois is the same as it was in 1989."

Findings showed that:

- The average median family income in Illinois dropped by \$6,000 over the six years when adjusted for inflation. The 12 percent decline in the state was the second largest in the nation and triple the overall U.S. rate.

- More than 222,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1995 and 2005.

- More than 70 percent of African Americans and 60 percent of Hispanics earn less than \$50,000, while half of Illinois' whites are paid at least \$75,000.

- The median wage for Illinoisans who lack a high school diploma slipped 25 percent between 1980 and 2004. For high school graduates, wages dropped 6.2 percent in the same period. Median wages for college-educated Illinoisans increased by 16.7 percent.

The Editors

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

Though the General Assembly is scheduled to adjourn April 7, two months earlier than usual, lawmakers introduced hundreds of proposals. Here are a few:

Sex offenders

The public would have access to more details about sex offenders under a proposal introduced by Sen. Kirk Dillard, a Hinsdale Republican. The sex offender registry would list such identifying marks as tattoos or scars, the county where the offender was convicted and the relationship to the victim. Offenders would have to register every 90 days instead of every year.

Landlords of duplexes, apartment buildings and mobile homes would have to notify tenants when an offender moves in under a measure proposed by Greenville Republican Rep. Ron Stephens. Potential tenants would receive written notice.

Another House measure that would have prohibited offenders from voting in school buildings was amended to ban felony sex offenders from voting at all. Offender's whose victims were children would not be able to go within 100 feet of a school-bus stop under that measure.

Smoking

As city councils throughout Illinois consider banning smoking in public places, Sen. John Cullerton proposed allowing counties to do the same. "Government has a role in health and [in] saving money because later on they will have to deal with people's health problems," Cullerton says.

Springfield Mayor Tim Davlin asked the Chicago Democrat to introduce the legislation. The capital city approved a smoking ban in January that will affect bars, restaurants and bowling alleys within the city limits. Cullerton says Sangamon County should have the ability to match that city's ban when it takes effect in September.

Ernie Slottag, the mayor's spokesman, says the measure would create a level playing field for businesses. "Springfield may be unique, but the mayor thinks there may be other communities that share the same problem," he says.

Cullerton also has introduced measures to prohibit smoking in college dormitories and county jails.

Meanwhile, Chicago Democratic Rep. Annazette Collins is pushing a ban on smoking statewide, with the exception of private homes and stores that sell tobacco products. Hotel and motel rooms designated for smoking also would be exempt.

Veterans

Impersonating a veteran with a special military license plate could be punishable by a \$1,000 fine under a proposal supported by Secretary of State Jesse White.

The sponsor, Democratic Rep. Charles Jefferson of Rockford, says he's responding to an instance in which the plates are being misused.

Under other proposed legislation, military reservists and guardsmen would be eligible for home-buyer assistance and

property tax exemptions if they receive full disability benefits, and veterans' children could be eligible for University of Illinois scholarships.

Minors

Teenagers would have to wait until they turn 18 to get a driver's license under a House measure. Democratic Rep. John D'Amico introduced his proposal in response to a teenager's death in a car accident in his Chicago district. The age to obtain a driver's permit would be raised to 17.

Rep. Milton Patterson, a Chicago Democrat, proposed allowing dependent children between ages 19 and 23 to buy into Gov. Rod Blagojevich's All Kids health insurance program. That program, which has yet to be implemented, would only cover children up to age 18.

Abandoned babies

Churches would be designated as drop-off locations for abandoned newborns under a House measure. Parents who abandon infants within 72 hours of birth have immunity from prosecution if the children are left with personnel at designated havens. Currently those are police stations, fire stations, hospitals and medical emergency facilities.

Environment

Numerous tax breaks designed to support alternative sources of energy were proposed in both chambers. Wind energy farms, owners of fuel-efficient cars and gas station operators who stock ethanol fuel would benefit.

Rep. Frank Mautino says his measure would create a uniform standard for taxing wind energy farms. "Right now, because it's considered private property, the only thing they have to assess is a slab of concrete with a stick in it," the Spring Valley Democrat says.

East St. Louis Democratic Sen. James Clayborne Jr. proposed creating the Mississippi River Coordinating Council to study environmental concerns about the river and surrounding communities. A House measure would create a similar council for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin states.

A Senate proposal would allocate \$750,000 in state general funds to eradicate the Asian carp, a fish that endangers the Great Lakes ecosystem.

Drugs

A substance found in over-the-counter cough medicine would be illegal under a measure proposed by Rep. Chapin Rose, a Mahomet Republican.

Dextromethorphan would be defined as a controlled substance. Also known as DXM, the pure powdered substance can be purchased through the Internet for recreational drug use.

Over-the-counter medicines would still be legal.

Rose's proposal would make selling the drug punishable by up to seven years in prison.

Jasmine Washington

Sprawl

Two counties at Chicagoland's outer reaches top the nation in home ownership rates, according to a recent University of Illinois at Chicago study.

Home ownership rates in McHenry and Will counties are at 85 percent and 84 percent, respectively, which is well above the 69 percent national average. In contrast, Cook County, which researchers dubbed the "urban core," fell below the national average with a 61 percent home ownership rate.

The researchers attributed the growth in McHenry and Will counties to low land prices and rising prosperity.

"First-time buyers frequently choose space over a convenient commute," they said in a printed statement. "Land in Will and McHenry counties is cheaper than elsewhere in the metropolitan area, so developers tend to build larger homes there."

Racial divide

Disparities exist between blacks and whites over spending to rebuild New Orleans, a study by researchers at the University of Chicago found.

The university's Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture surveyed more than 1,200 people through mail, phone and in-person interviews. The national pool included 487 blacks and 703 whites.

Then researchers showed survey participants separate television images of black and white families and asked them to choose one of these statements: "The federal government should spend whatever is necessary to rebuild the city and restore these Americans to their homes," or "Although this is a great tragedy, the federal government must not commit too many funds to rebuilding until we know how we will pay for it."

While 76 percent of the blacks surveyed thought the federal government should spend whatever is necessary to restore homes in New Orleans, only 33 percent of white respondents shared that view.

Whites who were shown images of

white families described as refugees were 6 percent more likely to support rebuilding than those who saw images of black families. Blacks were 5 percent more likely to support rebuilding if they were shown images of blacks.

Day laborers

Illinois scholars participated in a recent national study that outlined hardships endured by U.S. day workers.

Across the country, laborers hired by the day experience dangerous working conditions, physical abuse by employers and police harassment, according to a study conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of California at Los Angeles and the New School in New York City. The researchers say the three-year study of workers in 143 municipalities is the first of its kind.

The Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region's Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants and UCLA's Center for the Study of Urban Poverty funded the study.



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POWER SURGE

Utility rates are expected to go up, but no one is sure how high

By the time the state's freeze on power rates expires at the end of the year, rates will have held steady for a decade. It's inevitable they'll go up.

Most everybody who's fighting over ways to structure the electricity marketplace in the next few years seems to agree on that. Where they diverge is on how high rates ought to jump.

Commonwealth Edison and Ameren, the state's largest utilities, want to procure power through reverse auctions like those used in New Jersey. Under that system, a utility asks for a specific quantity of power and suppliers compete to sell it at the lowest price.

ComEd and Ameren argue this market-based system would guarantee consumers the best price. And, in late January, the Illinois Commerce Commission agreed. The commission's five members voted unanimously for the plan, and the first auction has been scheduled for September.

The commissioners acknowledged that allowing utilities to set power rates based on the auction means rates will escalate, perhaps dramatically. However, they argued they were presented with no other viable alternative.

"The facts are clear. Illinois ratepayers are currently being served by artificially low rates due to the rate freeze," Commissioner Erin O'Connell-Diaz said as she cast her vote. "When that rate freeze is lifted, it is folly to suggest that those rates will remain at 1995 levels. Of course, the new rates must reflect current market values." Utility companies insist rate hikes should be 20 percent or less.

At issue is the power bought by residential consumers and small businesses.

Consumer advocates argue there isn't sufficient competition among suppliers to ensure that consumers come out ahead. Exelon, ComEd's parent company, supplies most of the power sold in Illinois. Though several brokers may line up to sell power to ComEd at auction, consumer advocates argue Exelon will end up supplying the bulk of ComEd's power.

David Kolata, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board, says power rates could jump as much as 30 percent under the plan. He argues utilities should have to bargain directly with power suppliers instead — negotiations that would be monitored by the Commerce Commission.

"We think it's dangerous to eliminate this kind of state oversight because both ComEd and Ameren are owned by companies that make almost all of their money off generation," Kolata says. "So it's obvious that the higher prices that

consumers pay, the better off the parent companies do."

CUB intends to challenge the commission's decision in court. Meanwhile, Democratic Attorney General Lisa Madigan pledges to appeal her own unsuccessful court attempt to block the commission's decision.

Opponents of the reverse auction also may pursue legislation that would overrule the commission and impose checks on rate hikes. "I think that the General Assembly will be addressing this issue," Kolata says. "But whether or not they ultimately decide to pass a bill, I don't know. I think certainly we believe a combination of litigation and legislation is our best bet to overturn this decision."

House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, indicates he's seriously considering the matter, but declined to say whether he might spearhead legislation to limit rate hikes.

Even if Madigan takes up the cause, Senate President Emil Jones Jr., another Chicago Democrat, likely would be cool to a plan that is unfavorable to utilities. Jones says the Commerce Commission, not the legislature, is best suited to decide how to structure the energy market.

"They cannot play to the cheers of the crowd," Jones says. "They've got to make decisions that are in the best interests of business and the consumers of Illinois. That's why they're set up as an independent group where they do not have to run to the voters to get elected."

Sen. James Clayborne Jr., an East St. Louis Democrat and chairman of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee, says he doesn't know whether lawmakers will intervene. However, he suggests that consumer advocates who supported the deal that led to the 10-year rate freeze got what they bargained for.

Of course, the deal was predicated on the notion there would be greater competition in place when the freeze expired.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich has kept his eye on the deliberations. Last fall, the Democrat implied he would fire commissioners if they approved ComEd's plan. But after the Commerce Commission approved the reverse auction, the governor softened his posture. Blagojevich spokeswoman Abby Ottenhoff insisted the governor doesn't have the authority to remove anyone from the commission because of the vote.

As of mid-February, the Senate hadn't confirmed the governor's pick for commission chairman, former Rockford Mayor Charles Box. But Ottenhoff would not say whether Blagojevich might withdraw the nomination. Box, also a Democrat, voted for the reverse auction.

Aaron Chambers





OLD SLAVE HOUSE

Money for historic report called step to reopening

The state has moved toward reopening the last-known standing station of the "Reverse Underground Railroad," a three-story house outside Equality in southern Illinois' Gallatin County.

A \$150,000 fiscal year 2006 appropriation, released last month to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, is expected to cover the cost to assess the condition of the building. The report should cite whether repairs and archaeological studies are needed.

"It's basically the first step toward opening it as a state historical site," says David Blanchette, communications manager for the agency.

Saltmaker John Hart Crenshaw operated a secret slave jail on the third floor of the house. "We know he was involved in slave trading and kidnapping," says local historian Jon Musgrave of Marion, who is author of *Slaves, Salt, Sex & Mr. Crenshaw* and an advocate of reopening the estate under the name Old Slave House.

"In the 1830 census, 12 people were listed in his household as slaves," Musgrave says that blacks Crenshaw kidnapped and sold into slavery included Illinois Gov. Ninian Edwards' servant Maria Adams and her children. Musgrave believes shirt ruffles visible in photographs of Gov. Edwards were sewn on by Adams before her kidnapping.

For more than 60 years, visitors traveled to the slave house to witness this artifact of a dubious page in Illinois history. But the home was closed to visitors by the private owner in 1996. The state purchased the house and adjacent acreage in 2000 with the intention of opening a historic site, but the house has remained shuttered since.

Before it can be opened to the public, the agency will have to get funds for any work that needs to be done, as well as for staff and such operating costs as utilities.

"What we have is a very valuable historic resource that is not open to the public," Blanchette says. He describes the site as a "high priority" for the agency. The National Park Service lists it in its Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program.

Musgrave, who is a member of an organization called Open it NOW! Friends of the Old Slave House, calls the allocation a "major move forward" that doesn't go far enough. "At best, we're going to get some windows replaced or sealed."

Musgrave says he objects to the state's description of the site as the "Crenshaw House."

"I'm on a mission to bury the Crenshaw name because it sounds like we're trying to honor this guy," Musgrave, who has catalogued Crenshaw's sins, says a former slave named Robert Wilson told dozens of people from the 1920s through the 1940s that he was forced to father children into slavery at seven plantations — the last of them was the Old Slave House Crenshaw operated west of the Ohio River in Gallatin County.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney

State ethics proposals promoted again

This election season, politicians launched another push for full disclosure and accountability in state government. Illinois Comptroller Daniel Hynes assembled a bipartisan group of lawmakers and reform activists to revive an effort to prevent politicians from making deals with businesses in return for campaign donations, so-called pay-to-play politics.

"The call from the people of Illinois is loud and clear that something must be done to end corruption [in order] to restore public trust in government," Hynes says. "The public is fed up with lip service, procedural tinkering and obstructionists' excuses."

Reforms announced last month would prohibit state contractors from donating to public officials who award them contracts exceeding \$25,000.

"There is a perception out there that there is a connection between campaign contributions and the actions we take, even though, in actuality, [we] usually do what is right," says Sen. Miguel del Valle, a Chicago Democrat. "Given that perception, we have an obligation to address the concerns of the public as a legislature."

In a proposal sponsored by Sen. Kwame Raoul, a Chicago Democrat, and Sen. Kirk Dillard, a Hinsdale Republican, state Supreme Court elections would be financed by a tax checkoff and court fees.

Candidates could apply for \$750,000 from the fund. Individual contributions would be restricted to no more than \$1,000.

Danville Republican Rep. Bill Black says the reform package isn't aimed at any one person or party. "It's just time to set some new parameters of how we do business and put transparency in it."

GOP Rep. Elizabeth Coulson of Glenview says Illinois has been recognized as one of the top five states ensuring public access to campaign finance information and disclosure laws. "It doesn't mean we've done enough, but it does mean we have been moving forward."

Meanwhile, Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration has been subpoenaed in a federal probe into state hiring practices. The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority was subpoenaed about contracts with oasis vendors who have ties to Blagojevich's top fundraiser.

Jasmine Washington

ROULETTE

The governor's stance on gambling revolves

Rod Blagojevich was unambiguous about gambling while he was running for governor.

He marked "Oppose" rather than "Support" next to each of 12 examples of expanded gambling on a candidate survey by the Illinois Church Action on Alcohol and Addiction Problems, a key group in a statewide coalition fighting state-sanctioned gambling. The Chicago Democrat indicated he opposed land-based casinos, electronic gambling devices at taverns and additional riverboat casinos.

In fact, Blagojevich campaigned publicly against expanding gambling, which some policymakers view as a golden egg when revenue runs short. He said policymakers get addicted to gambling, just as gamblers do, and that they must resist the temptation.

But since taking office in 2003, Blagojevich has contemplated more gambling as a way to dig the state out of a fiscal hole. His latest proposal was offered in late January when he unsuccessfully sought to back borrowing for school construction by authorizing keno in the state's taverns.

"He's really a contortionist," says Tom Grey, executive director of the National Coalition Against Gambling Expansion. "You talk about three strikes and you're out in baseball. Well, he's up to about strike four on that pledge in terms of proposing things that would have broken it."

Blagojevich indicated a willingness to break his no-new-gambling pledge even before taking the oath of office. A month before he won election, he said he was intrigued by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley's push for a city-owned casino.

But Blagojevich spokeswoman Rebecca Rausch says the governor sees gambling as a means to an end — a way to generate cash for a specific need.

So far, gambling hasn't been increased on his watch. But as Blagojevich struggled to balance his desire to generate more cash against the political risks of doing so — particularly when he pledged not to — he has carried the state through a series of agonizing deliberations.

During his first spring session, Blagojevich refused to rule out more gambling as a way to help patch an estimated \$5 billion budget deficit. As a result, the gaming industry and pro-gambling lawmakers formulated a massive proposal to allow slot machines at horse-racing tracks, let existing casinos expand and land a city-owned casino in Chicago. Then in late May of that year, a little more than a week before the constitutional deadline for

completing legislative business, Blagojevich at last said he stood firmly against new gambling. Many lawmakers complained they had been double-crossed.

The following spring, Blagojevich again waited until May to take a hard line on gambling. A day after Daley formally called on Springfield to authorize a land-based, city-owned casino in

Chicago, Blagojevich said he would veto such a measure. He said he was open to other forms of new gambling but, with Chicago out of the mix, the pro-gambling push collapsed.

Blagojevich said a casino in Chicago would turn "the Land of Lincoln into the Land of Wayne Newton." As he had the previous year, he chided lawmakers for turning to the "easy" budget fix. The governor closed the door when he refused to support video poker, which he called the "crack cocaine of gambling."

Yet Blagojevich continued to send mixed signals. In 2004, Senate President Emil Jones

Jr., a Chicago Democrat who led Daley's fight for a casino, said publicly that he had secured the governor's support for Daley's plan. Blagojevich aides responded that the governor had not fully formed his opinion on the matter, and that Jones' remark was premature.

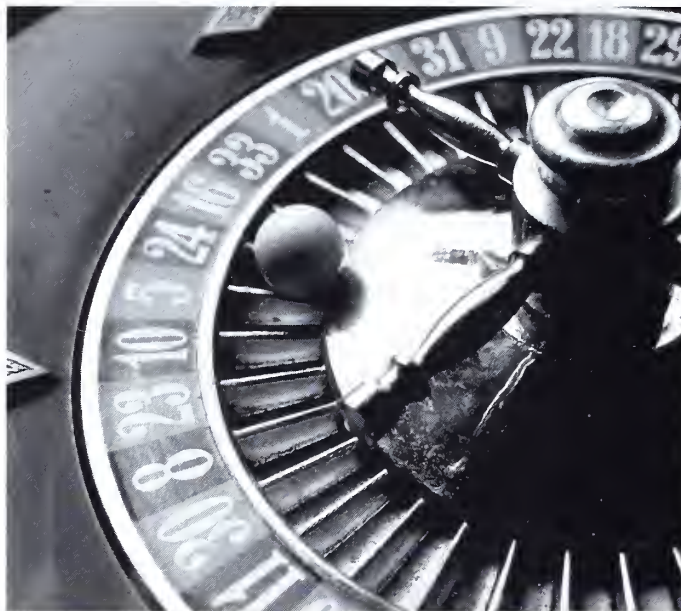
Then last year it was Blagojevich who led the charge for more gambling. He argued casinos should be allowed to double their capacity. He said this could raise \$300 million for schools. But his plan died amid opposition from casinos, whose operators wanted their taxes cut.

Blagojevich led the charge again this spring. This time, he faced an array of opposition to his keno gambling plan. Latino legislators complained there already is too much gambling in their communities. Republicans argued Blagojevich needed the General Assembly's approval to put keno in the state's taverns, though the governor insisted keno would be an extension of the state's lottery and didn't require legislative support. Republicans asked Attorney General Lisa Madigan for an opinion on the matter, and the Democratic attorney general endorsed the GOP's position.

At the same time, Blagojevich was dogged by news reports showing firms that were in line to implement the keno plan, on the state's dime, were represented by the governor's friends.

Hours before the attorney general released her opinion in late January, Blagojevich backed off this latest plan.

Aaron Chambers



Illinois ranks STATE OF THE STATES

Illinois frequently emerged among notable locales named in Stateline.org's report, *2006 State Policy Developments and Trends*. The Washington, D.C.-based news service is run by the Pew Research Center.

Among the trends involving Illinois that Stateline.org spotted:

- States' abilities to deploy National Guard members in cases of emergency have been depleted by President George W. Bush's war on terrorism.

More than 280,000 Army National Guard members, or 80 percent of the force, have been sent to Afghanistan, Iraq or other foreign lands since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, according to Stateline.org.

Meanwhile, nearly 400 Guard members have been killed, most of them in Iraq. Illinois is one of 11 states that had lost more than 10 guardsmen as of December 14.

Illinois ranked No. 8, with 15 guardsmen killed.

- Illinois is among nine states that allow undocumented immigrants who are raised in those states to attend college at in-state tuition rates. New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas go further. They fund college scholarships for illegal immigrants' children who were raised in those states.

With a 2005 decision, Washington joined states that provide health care to the children of undocumented immigrants. California, Massachusetts and New York also provide nonemergency medical treatment to the children even if their parents are not documented.

Stateline.org notes that immigration issues are generally handled at the national level, but "state political leaders are increasingly taking a larger role in defining how America copes with the influx of illegal aliens."

Stateline.org also cited an Illinois law protecting immigrants. The law, signed in 2005, "imposes stiff penalties on employers who cheat day laborers, such as by illegally deducting meals or transportation from their paychecks,

and creates new guidelines for hiring and paying these workers."

Illinois is one of eight states with an undocumented migrant population higher than 250,000.

- Illinois is among those states that have enacted energy conservation measures, including standards for statewide use of such renewable energy sources as wind, solar and hydropower. It also is among those that require energy utilities to set aside money for programs that encourage efficiency.

However, several other states, including Arizona, California, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington, also require a specific number of home appliances to meet energy efficiency standards. Illinois does not.

The United States encompasses 5 percent of the world's population and consumes 24 percent of its energy, according to the Stateline.org report.



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HOUSING ILLINOIS

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Economic indicators hit eight-year high

Illinois appears to have avoided the late 2005 slowdown of the national economy, according to a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign professor who tracks the state's economic data.

The U of I's Flash Index for January hit a post-2001-recession high, according to J. Fred Giertz, an economist in the Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

The state's insulation from the national slowdown at the end of last year is important because the overall national economy has at times been better than Illinois', according to Giertz. "This is good news since Illinois lost ground to the rest of the nation during and after the 2001 recession," Giertz stated in a release. "The state now appears to be catching up."

Giertz's flash index is a weighted average of Illinois growth rates in corporate earnings, consumer spending and personal income. He adjusts tax receipts from corporate income, personal income and retail sales for inflation before calculating growth rates.

The 107.1 index for January topped December 2005. The index, which uses 100 as a benchmark for economic health, was at its most favorable point since January 1998.

UPDATES

- Southern Illinois University entered a consent decree promising to open its graduate programs to all students to fend off a threatened suit by the U.S. Justice Department over the agency's concern that minority preferences amounted to anti-white bias. (See *Illinois Issues*, February, page 18.)
- Federal money to help Illinois pay for a \$9.1 million electronic barrier to keep the invasive Asian Carp from entering the Great Lakes is in jeopardy. (See *Illinois Issues*, January, page 10.)
- U.S. Senate and House negotiators reached an agreement to make permanent key provisions of the USA Patriot Act. (See *Illinois Issues*, June 2005, page 14.)

BOOKSHELF

Women, race and peace

Illinois publishers' recent offerings feature several related to race and women's rights. They include Wendy Sharer's *Vote and Voice: Women's Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930* and Joyce Blackwell's *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975*, which were published by the Southern Illinois University Press-Carbondale.

Vote and Voice examines the political writings and speeches of women in the wake of the suffrage movement. Those women include such Illinoisans as Hull House founder Jane Addams, whose Women's International League for Peace and Freedom met head-to-head with President Woodrow Wilson over opposition to World War I. Addams wrote: "The persistent tendency of the President to divorce his theory from the actual conduct of state affairs threw [the WILPF] into a state of absolute bewilderment."

Sharer, an assistant English professor at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., notes the women recognized that though they won the ear of policymakers, "they had no power to negotiate international policies. Indeed, as Addams herself acknowledged, 'Perhaps the ministers talked freely to us because we were so absolutely unofficial.'"

Meanwhile, Blackwell's book addresses the league's trouble drawing black women into its fold. Blackwell, a historian at St. Augustine College in Raleigh, N.C., notes that for black women the notions of "peace and freedom were inseparable," setting them apart from white activist counterparts. "For the WILPF to achieve domestic and international peace and freedom, black peace activists reasoned, its members had to be ready to eradicate all vestiges of racial injustice at home as well as all human oppression abroad."

The memoir *Another Way Home: The Tangled Roots of Race in One Chicago Family* by Ronne Hartfield was published in paperback by the University of Chicago Press.

The book, which tells the story of a family that settled in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood, is centered on the author's mother, the mixed-race granddaughter of a former slave. Hartfield notes what she calls the "dismaying etymological origins" of the term mulatto: the "distinctly non-thoroughbred animal produced by the mating of a donkey and a mare." That perspective is woven into her tale, which is the backdrop for critical moments in race relations, including the Great Migration, the riots of 1919 and the murder of Emmett Till.

Hartfield, a Harvard University research fellow in religion and art, often quotes her mother's wisdom directly as she weaves her story: "Well, it's a bad thing that Chicago is so segregated, I grant you that, but the good part of it is that the colored people know all the whys, whats and wherefores of just how things go."

Also providing a picture of African Americans' struggles to settle in Chicago are Amanda J. Seligman's *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* and Washington University historian Margaret Garb's *City of American Dreams: A History of Home Ownership and Housing Reform in Chicago, 1871-1919*. Both were published by the University of Chicago Press.

Seligman, a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee history and urban studies scholar, details the reactions of whites on the West Side of Chicago as the racial demographics of their neighborhoods rapidly changed in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s: "To summarize the behavior of white West Siders as 'white flight' is to narrow the breadth of their struggles to preserve their neighborhoods. Describing whites' relationship to the city by examining only moments of their leaving neglects their multiple sources of discontent with the post-war urban environment."

Garb postulates that early housing policies split Chicago. "The emergence of the single-family, owner-occupied house as the symbol of the American dream, an ideal inspired by immigrant wage laborers struggling to survive on low wages in an industrializing city," she writes, "left twentieth-century Chicago sharply divided along class and racial lines."



Maureen Foertsch McKinney

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Governor's challenge

A rough primary season could
draw national attention to Illinois' top race

by Kurt Erickson

In the wake of Illinois' 2002 election, pundits leaped headlong onto Rod Blagojevich's bandwagon. The three-term congressman from Chicago had just become the state's first Democrat to be elected governor in a quarter century.

Let's listen in on MSNBC commentator Chris Matthews:

"Rod was raised in a small apartment on Chicago's Northwest Side. He started shining shoes at age 9," Matthews said in a November 2002 post-election analysis. "He loved Teddy Roosevelt. He went to Northwestern and then law school. I met him a few years ago. He's a real go-getter who could be president some day, just like Teddy Roosevelt."

Three years later, enthusiasm for Blagojevich is more tempered. True, he won legislative approval to create a health insurance program for all Illinois children, he raised the minimum wage and he kept his pledge not to raise general state taxes. But to keep the state afloat and expand

social programs, he has raised taxes and fees on businesses and tapped millions of dollars earmarked for public employee pensions.

And while he has an overflowing campaign war chest, revelations about federal investigations of his administration's hiring practices have raised questions about the value of his political stock.

Analysts say that national Republican and Democratic leaders have, for now, largely turned their attentions to open-seat governor's races in other states, such as Ohio, which was a key swing state in the 2004 presidential election. Both parties are ready to step in behind candidates seeking to replace Republican Bob Taft, who is stepping down because of term limits.

There are three reasons the Land of Lincoln is not yet in play, analysts say: Illinois, with its vote for Democrat John Kerry in 2004 and its two Democratic U.S. senators, has become widely perceived as a so-called Blue State; Blagojevich has a

large campaign account; and the GOP was unable to unite behind one candidate.

"The Republicans are playing defense in other states, defending those governorships. They would regard Illinois as a long shot. I just can't see them making a priority of it, even with Blagojevich looking kind of weak," says political scientist Brian Gaines of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois. "If [former Gov. Jim] Edgar had come in, it might be a different story."

Still, *Washington Post* columnist David Broder suggested in a January column that those who ignore Illinois' gubernatorial race might be missing something.

Broder, who cut his journalistic teeth as a reporter at the Bloomington *Pantagraph*, wrote that governors — not U.S. senators or representatives — are often closer to their constituents and exert more influence on presidential politics than their federal counterparts.

"The campaigns in Illinois, Iowa,



Rod Blagojevich

DEMOCRAT

Elected governor in 2002 after three terms in Congress and two terms in the Illinois House
Age: 49

Web site: RodforIllinois.com



Edwin Eisendrath

DEMOCRAT

Administrator at Kendall College in Chicago. Alderman from Chicago's 43rd Ward from 1987 to 1993. Unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1990. Served in Clinton Administration
Age: 47

Web site: Eisendrath2006.com

Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin will tell us more about the direction of the country and the shape of the 2008 presidential battleground than any of the battles for Capitol Hill," he wrote.

Jennifer Duffy, managing editor of the Washington D.C.-based *Cook Political Report*, allows that both parties may be watching Illinois from the sidelines for now, but they could become more active once the primary is over.

What Republicans and Democrats will watch is how Blagojevich fares against Democratic challenger Edwin Eisendrath, a former Chicago alderman who didn't formally launch his bid until December. Eisendrath, a 47-year-old administrator at Kendall College in Chicago, is making Blagojevich's credibility an issue, saying he promised reform but is dogged by allegations that campaign contributors have received jobs and state contracts during his tenure.

"People are seeing a more vulnerable Rod Blagojevich than I anticipated," says Duffy. "The primary may serve to demonstrate some of those vulnerabilities."

In other words, if the governor emerges from the primary bloodied, Illinois could become a focal point on the national stage, drawing interest from Republicans hungry to pick up a seat and Democrats looking to hang on to what they have.

Against the backdrop of a closely watched primary challenge between Blagojevich and Eisendrath, four Republicans are vying to gain the attention of Illinois voters as they hurtle toward the March 21 primary.

In December, after trying to woo Edgar into a reprise of his two terms as governor, state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka waded into the crowded Republican field, seeking to send Blagojevich into early retirement. She entered the race on the assumption she

is the front-runner. A GOP-sponsored poll in December showed her holding a 39- to 12-percent advantage over conservative Sugar Grove dairy magnate Jim Oberweis, loser of two previous statewide primaries for a seat in the U.S. Senate.

In addition to Topinka, there is Ron Gidwitz, the wealthy former chairman of the State Board of Education. And there is state Sen. Bill Brady, a Bloomington real estate developer and veteran of the General Assembly, who is emphasizing his conservative, downstate roots.

All four GOP contenders have spent more time shining a spotlight on Blagojevich's troubles than on their differences.

They have grounds for doing so. An October 2005 poll by the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, showed that support for Blagojevich among registered voters was hovering below 40 percent, and only about one in three voters wanted to see the Democratic governor re-elected. A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*/KMOV-TV poll in mid-January showed the governor with an undesirable 47 percent "favorable" rating among likely voters.

In her closing remarks at a Republican debate on January 25, Topinka told a crowd in Naperville, "Anybody here on this stage is better than Rod Blagojevich." She got no argument from Oberweis, Gidwitz or Brady.

Like Eisendrath, Republicans are targeting Blagojevich's ongoing troubles with federal investigators, who are probing the administration's hiring practices. But they also are trying to address their own, often fractious, internecine battles over abortion, taxes and gay marriage.

Hoping to bring the disparate elements together, Topinka and Gidwitz have linked up with lieutenant governor candidates who have strong ties to the party's conservative anti-abortion bloc. Gidwitz asked

state Sen. Steve Rauschenberger of Elgin to be his informal running mate, while Topinka quickly convinced DuPage County State's Attorney Joe Birkett to run as a lieutenant governor candidate and campaign with her. Both Birkett and Rauschenberger had been considered potential gubernatorial candidates after running credible statewide races for attorney general and U.S. Senate, respectively.

In addition to answering to the factions within their own party, the Republican quartet must battle a perception of a party in disarray in the aftermath of the 2004 U.S. Senate race in which Republicans invited ultra-conservative commentator Alan Keyes into Illinois to lose badly to U.S. Sen. Barack Obama. And they must do so while former Republican Gov. George Ryan sits in a federal courtroom facing charges that he and his relatives accepted tens of thousands of dollars in gifts, cash and other bribes in exchange for state business contracts during his tenure as secretary of state and governor.

Each of the Republicans is trying to build a case that she or he is the best candidate to run against Blagojevich, whose tenure has been marked with high-profile legislative wins and questions about his ethics, thanks to the ongoing federal probe.

There are other talking points. Outside of Cook County, the message is that Blagojevich has moved state government to Chicago. Throughout the state, the message is that Blagojevich is more interested in burnishing his image and his poll numbers than in running state government.

Republicans point to failed Blagojevich initiatives on such issues as barring minors from buying violent video games, abolishing the state board of education and selling the state's main



Bill Brady

REPUBLICAN

State senator since 2002.
Member of Illinois House
from 1993 to 2000. Unsuccessful
bid for Congress in 2000.
Real estate developer
Age: 44
Web site: Citizensforbillbrady.com



Ron Gidwitz

REPUBLICAN

Chicago businessman. Former
CEO of Helene Curtis and former
chairman of the Illinois State
Board of Education
Age: 59
Web site: Ron2006.com

office building in Chicago. All of these ideas were either rebuffed by lawmakers or dumped for being unconstitutional, leaving the governor vulnerable to criticism that he's short on substance.

"You can't just go for a headline and walk away," says Topinka.

Despite what her opponents say about her connections to George Ryan and the GOP's old guard, Topinka has a resumé that appears to give her front-runner status in the Republican field.

The 62-year-old is the only candidate to win statewide office, and she served as chairwoman of the Illinois Republican Party. She also has the backing of Edgar, who remains among the party's most popular figures, as well as U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood, a Peoria Republican who is a pragmatic voice in the party's hierarchy.

Edgar foreshadowed Topinka's message in early November, saying he believes Illinoisans are unhappy with Blagojevich's tenure. "People from all walks of life throughout the state have expressed to me their frustration and unhappiness with the current direction of the state."

After months of trying to lure Edgar into the race — a move she believed essentially would clear the field for a head-to-head matchup against Blagojevich — Topinka announced her own plans to run for the top spot.

In comments immediately after she launched her campaign, she addressed the Republican hot-button issue of abortion, saying she supports a woman's right to choose, with "some commonsense restrictions." For example, she would sign off on a plan requiring parental consent for minors seeking abortions and would ban so-called partial-birth abortions.

If that wasn't enough to anger conservatives, she refused to make a pledge not to

raise taxes and reiterated her support for anti-discrimination laws for gays.

Her response: "I'm not the candidate from central casting."

Topinka's role overseeing the state's investments has given her a front-row view of the fiscal policies of three governors. Of those, she has saved her most vocal criticism for Democrat Blagojevich, who she says has generated too much long-term debt in his first three years in office.

She says she would try to spur investment in Illinois through targeted tax breaks and investment incentives and attempt to rein in the state's spending practices to free up more money for schools.

"We waste money in this state like crazy," she says.

At the same time, Topinka also has faced scrutiny over her handling of a long-running state-backed loan dispute with the politically connected owners of two hotels, one in Collinsville, the other in Springfield.

In 1995, Topinka said she wanted to cut the state's losses, and offered the owners — including Republican fundraiser William Cellini of Springfield — a chance to clear \$40 million in debt for \$10 million. Topinka scrapped the plan after it was blocked by then-Attorney General Jim Ryan's office. The issue remains the subject of legal challenges.

By bringing Birkett on board, Topinka is hoping to blunt charges she is too moderate. She also is looking to his law-and-order credentials.

On the issue of the hotel deal, for instance, Birkett, a prosecutor, says Topinka has run an "honest administration."

"Judy has a record of integrity across the state," says Birkett.

Among Topinka's most vocal critics is Oberweis, chairman of the family-owned Oberweis Dairy in North Aurora and the president of a mutual fund and money management firm who lost primary bids for the U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004. Backed by such conservative activists as Jack Roeser and his Family Taxpayers Network, Oberweis has pledged not to raise taxes and to roll back tax and fee hikes imposed by Blagojevich during his first year in office.

Oberweis, 59, is carrying the conservative mantle after initially coming out in favor of abortion rights during his failed 2002 campaign for the U.S. Senate. At that time, he was supportive of abortion rights, saying government should not impose religious beliefs on its people. He switched his position for his 2004 Senate run and is now sticking with it. He also is strongly against gay marriage.

On budget issues, he says he would lift the tax and fee hikes imposed on businesses during Blagojevich's first term. He also promotes the theory that less government intrusion will trigger investment by businesses, which will generate more revenue for schools. He supports school vouchers, home-schooling initiatives and changing teacher tenure laws.

During his 2004 campaign, his television ads — paid partly through nearly \$2 million of his own money — drew the scorn of immigration experts when he warned that 10,000 illegal immigrants were crossing into the United States on a daily basis.

In 2004, he picked up 23 percent of the vote, coming in second to Jack Ryan. Party leaders passed him over for Alan Keyes when Ryan exited the race after it was disclosed he took his former wife to sex clubs during their marriage.



Jim Oberweis

REPUBLICAN

Owner of North Aurora-based Oberweis Dairy. Ran unsuccessful races for U.S. Senate in 2002 and 2004

Age: 59

Web site: OberweisforIllinois.com



Judy Baar Topinka

REPUBLICAN

Three-term state treasurer. Former state senator. Former chairwoman of the Illinois Republican Party

Age: 62

Web site: Judyforgov.com

Roeser's backing of Oberweis with \$200,000 in contributions from two PACs has brought some scrutiny. The two committees have been fined a total of \$61,000 by state election regulators for missing filing dates — a situation that has raised questions among campaign watchdogs about Oberweis' efforts to cast himself as a reform candidate.

Gidwitz, 60, has pledged to spend whatever it takes to win. But, despite buying more than \$2 million in television advertisements beginning last summer, early poll numbers have not shown him gaining traction.

Like Topinka, Gidwitz has faced the challenge of distancing himself from George Ryan, who appointed him chairman of the State Board of Education in the late 1990s.

Gidwitz describes himself as "pro-choice" and once gave money to an abortion rights group. But he says he also favors requiring parental consent in the case of teen pregnancies.

Although he's a major contributor to Republican politicians — he's contributed more than \$1 million to candidates since 1998 — Gidwitz also has given money to Democrats, including Chicago Mayor Richard Daley.

In December, hoping to downplay claims that his stance on abortion makes him too moderate to win the primary, he convinced the more conservative Rauschenberger to run for lieutenant governor as a team.

Gidwitz has played the reform card, too, accusing Blagojevich of fostering a "pay-to-play" atmosphere in Springfield by allegedly awarding lucrative state contracts to campaign contributors.

"Gov. Blagojevich ran on a platform of ending business as usual. But by all accounts, it's business worse than usual," Gidwitz says, pointing to a series of federal subpoenas and Blagojevich's acknowledgment that he has spoken with federal investigators.

He won't pledge not to raise taxes, but he says he can avoid it, if elected, by restructuring corporate taxes, which he

says would result in job growth.

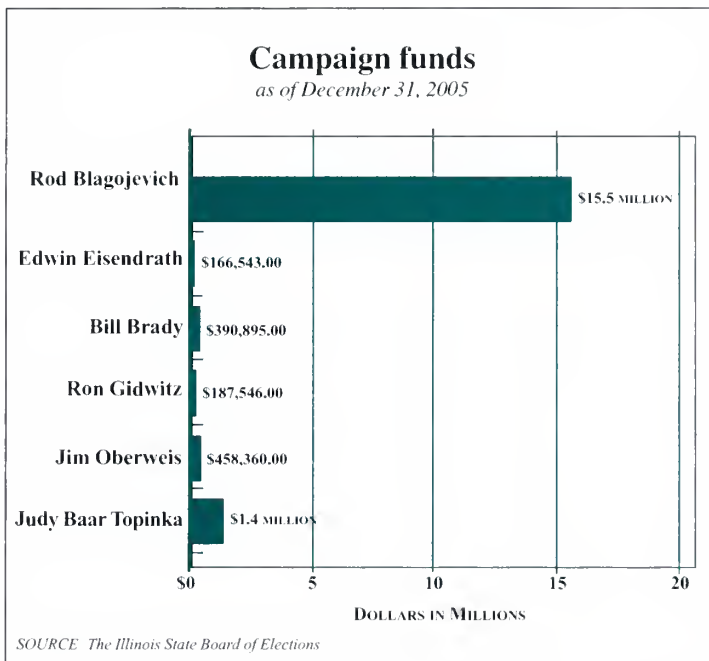
Like his colleagues, he says eliminating government waste and increasing revenue through business growth could provide solutions to spending inequities between poor and rich school districts. He also has expressed support for school vouchers in cases where parents want to send their children to less-crowded schools. Hoping to strike a middle-of-the-road stance on gun control, Gidwitz wants to extend the federal ban on assault weapons while

insurance program, an initiative that was approved with scant Republican support. The plan, which has won Blagojevich kudos among Democrats on a national level, will go into effect July 1 — despite Republican concerns during debate last fall that there is no way to tell how much the program will cost.

Like his campaign colleagues, Brady says he would eliminate \$300 million in tax and fee hikes imposed on businesses during Blagojevich's first year in office.

Brady and Blagojevich shared the stage earlier in the governor's term, voicing their shared plan to ax the State Board of Education. The governor's effort failed, but Brady says he would resurrect the idea on the theory that gutting the bureaucracy would free up millions of dollars for local school districts.

Vying with Gidwitz as the major Republican candidate least known to most voters (Andy Martin, a GOP activist, also is running), Brady was counseled by party leaders to run for an office lower on the ticket, but he says he believes he has the momentum needed to overcome his more well-known and well-heeled



lifting Chicago's ban on handguns. He opposes gay marriages but is not opposed to civil unions. He also favors the death penalty but is undecided about whether to lift a moratorium on executions.

Brady, 44, is at the midpoint of his first full term in the Senate. That means he can run and lose and still remain in the seat he has held since 2002, following the departure of his political mentor, former state Sen. John Maitland of Bloomington. Brady, who also served in the House from 1993 through 2000, had been out of politics for two years after he lost a congressional primary race to represent central Illinois' 15th District.

As a lawmaker, Brady has a conservative voting record on social and financial issues, including opposition to abortion and taxes. In a nod to the gun lobby, he says he would do away with the state's Firearm Owner's Identification card.

If elected, Brady says he would phase out Blagojevich's All Kids health

opponents.

"We will have a well-financed campaign," says Brady.

He also says the pairings of Topinka with Birkett and Gidwitz with Rauschenberger are a case of the candidates trying to be "everything to everybody."

"There is no mixed message here," says Brady.

He says he caught a break in Rauschenberger's exit from the race, which left him as the lone candidate with experience in the state Senate. He also is hoping to tap into voter discontent in areas outside of Chicago, saying he is the only downstate candidate.

All four have expressed support for lifting a moratorium on executions in Illinois.

Against the backdrop of the four-way Republican battle, Blagojevich will have his own primary race to contend with as he ends his first term in office.

Yet, while other candidates began outlining their positions in the fall,

Blagojevich, 49, refused to formally announce his candidacy for re-election until late February, saying he was too busy governing the state to trifle with a campaign.

In speeches throughout the state, the governor has emphasized his All Kids health insurance plan and his ability to keep the state operating during down fiscal times without raising taxes as examples of his success as a chief executive.

His message, however, continues to be clouded by a federal probe into allegations that campaign contributors have received jobs or contracts. That problem was brought into focus again in January after he proposed adding keno to the state lottery. Within days of unveiling the plan, newspapers reported that two members of his kitchen Cabinet were employed as lobbyists for companies that run keno games in other states. Blagojevich has nearly abandoned the reformer message of his successful 2002 campaign.

Eisendrath, vice president of academic affairs at Kendall College in Chicago, has tried to capitalize on Blagojevich's woes. He has raised questions about the governor's fundraising practices and a scandal at the state Teachers Retirement System, which resulted in federal

indictments of Blagojevich contributors.

Blagojevich has returned campaign contributions from three men involved in the scheme to leverage money from investment firms doing business with the state-run pension system, but Eisendrath says he hasn't done enough.

"The governor's fundraising scandals continue to undermine trust in the pension system and erode confidence in government," says Eisendrath.

In addition to serving as a Chicago alderman from 1987 to 1993, Eisendrath unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 1990 against Sidney Yates and served as a regional director in the Department of Housing and Urban Development during President Bill Clinton's administration. Among his tasks was overseeing the demolition of troubled housing projects in Chicago.

Eisendrath appeared on the scene in December with no known campaign organization, but a belief that Blagojevich is weak on the issue of ethics.

He argues that Blagojevich has transformed many state workers into his own personal public relations machines by requiring, for example, parole agents to distribute leaflets promoting the governor. "They've built a wall around the truth."

Eisendrath favors strict controls on gun ownership and won't take a pledge not to raise taxes.

Despite Eisendrath's presence in the race, behavior on the Democratic side of the primary appears to be relatively civil compared to the Republican infighting. Early on, Blagojevich sealed the support of House Speaker Michael Madigan, who is head of the Democratic Party of Illinois, and Senate President Emil Jones Jr., the governor's most reliable ally in the legislature. The two General Assembly leaders, who have wide influence over Democratic politics in Illinois, are co-chairing the governor's re-election campaign.

Eisendrath acknowledges that he faces long odds. "I've told everyone this will be a rough ride."

Gaines, the U of I political scientist, says the trip will be rocky for whoever wins the Republican primary. "The national party would regard it as an uphill race," Gaines says. "It would just be a pure bonus if one of these candidates put together a perfect storm and knocked Blagojevich out." □

Kurt Erickson covers state government and politics for Lee News Service, which has newspapers in the Quad Cities, DeKalb, Bloomington, Decatur, Mattoon, Charleston and Carbondale.

In the balance

Two suburban Chicago races could tip partisan control in Congress

by Eric Ferkenhoff

Two years ago, when Democrat Melissa Bean, a suburban businesswoman, managed to edge out Phil Crane for a seat in Congress, the Illinois GOP was already deeply wounded.

Republicans may have been riding high at the national level as President George W. Bush headed to a second term, but the Illinois Republican Party was in

shambles. Losing the 8th District, a mostly well-heeled and historically Republican stronghold long dominated by Crane, seemed just one more proof that the state party, as retiring U.S. Sen. Peter Fitzgerald put it, had lost its way.

Yet Illinois Republicans hope Bean's upstart victory was an aberration, a result of Crane's souring image. They argue he

was vulnerable because he had been in office long enough to be seen as an outsider, more comfortable in the halls of Washington than in catering to his constituents spread across the outer reaches of suburbia in far northern Cook, Lake and McHenry counties.

Once the six Republicans vying to oust Bean hash it out in this month's primary,

conventional GOP wisdom says, the winner will scoot easily to victory and again represent this wealthy mix of far suburban and rural households in a district that ranks third in the state in median income.

Meanwhile, 20 miles to the southeast, Republicans are closely guarding a seat that is up for grabs because Henry Hyde, a 30-year veteran of Congress and one of Washington's heavyweights, is calling it quits. The GOP's hold on this district, which covers most of DuPage County, has been equally firm and lengthy, but this district is more middle-class than the 8th — and more diverse than it has been historically. So, though Hyde spent his career taking care of the mostly western suburbs and boosting Illinois on the national stage, the 6th District can no longer be taken for granted, says Dick Simpson, a political science professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"If the Republicans can win in some key districts, in the 6th and the 8th, they will at least temporarily re-establish their dominance in the Chicago suburban region," Simpson says. "But this may not be long-lived."

In fact, the demographics have shifted, trending younger and more diverse, across much of Chicago's suburban landscape. And those trends are working against the GOP in these two key congressional districts, Simpson says.

"They're changing, growing fast and gaining many Latino voters who the Republicans aren't quite sure how to handle. This could hold big consequences for the state, but also at the national level, where it could make a huge difference."

National political observers have pointed to the 8th and 6th districts as pivotal contests that could help swing the balance of power in Washington and signal trends elsewhere in the country.

Nationally, Republicans aim to retain power in a U.S. House of Representatives that breaks in their favor, 231 to 201. To do that, they'll need to prevent Democrats from picking up at least 15 seats that party will need if it is to win control.

Here in Illinois, Republicans hope high-profile races for congressional seats in the November general election, bolstered by a heated race for governor,

can help turn the partisan tide in a state where President Bush lost by 10 percent in 2004.

Writing for *Roll Call*, Stuart Rothenberg named the retiring Hyde's 6th District one of the "dangerous dozen" races that could tip the balance in Washington. *The Cook Political Report* also noted the district's vulnerability to Democratic control. The stakes are so high that U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel, a Chicagoan who is Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman, stepped in to sign on wounded Iraqi war veteran L. Tammy Duckworth to run in the primary. Duckworth, a Hoffman Estates resident who turns 38 in mid-March, will battle 2004 Democratic nominee Christine Cegelis, 53, of Rolling Meadows and Wheaton College professor Lindy Scott, 54. In November, one of them will face conservative Republican state Sen. Peter Roskam of Wheaton, who is running uncontested in the primary.

"In so many campaigns, the onus is on Democrats to prove they're moderate enough," Duckworth spokesman Billy Weinberg says. "Here, if you're looking to the general election, the shoe is clearly on the other foot, and it will be up to Roskam to prove he connects, given his stance on issues."

Roskam says he understands national Democrats' interest in his race, but he doubts there's been much of a partisan shift in the 6th.

"There's not enough open seats in the country for the Democrats to ignore any of them, so of course there's attention there," he says. "The seat also has symbolism — the legacy of Henry Hyde, which resonates with people on both sides of the spectrum. And the district is squeezed between House Speaker Hastert and Emanuel. And it's just south of Bean's district, which is the biggest target in the country. So of course, it's going to draw attention."

"But I've personally knocked on 3,600 doors. The people who answer are Asian, African American, Hispanic. So yes, the face of DuPage County and the district has changed, but I'm not buying that the value system in the district is changing. That said, I'm encouraged, but I know I have to work hard."

Though Roskam, 44, is running unopposed, he already has amassed

"If the Republicans can win in some key districts, the 6th and the 8th, they will at least temporarily re-establish their dominance in the Chicago suburban region."

more than \$1 million and had upwards of \$800,000 on hand for his campaign to succeed Hyde. Duckworth, the Democrat with the largest campaign account, ended 2005 with \$106,000. Scott, of Wheaton, ended last year with about \$79,000 cash.

But Cegelis, who had raised \$39,000 through the end of 2005, says she doubts money will carry the day.

"I have people whose feet are on the street," Cegelis says, referring to her volunteers, and campaign staff who believe the district, while identified with Hyde and the GOP for a generation, is split closer to 50-50 between Republicans and Democrats.

And that may bode well for Democrats, according to some other political watchers who argue that Roskam leans too far right for a district that is more comfortable in the middle.

Still, Ryan McLaughlin, Roskam's spokesman, says he isn't convinced. "I don't know what's meant by too conservative," he says. "Lower taxes? Less government? Protecting our borders and our families? That's what put a man in Congress for more than 30 years and that's what people feel here."

Scott, a Spanish and Latin American studies teacher at Wheaton College, is pressing for an end to the war in Iraq and has pledged to use his faith as a guide if elected.

Cegelis, meanwhile, touts her computer background in a region she says has been sapped of too many high-end jobs. "I think the voters are changing in this district and looking for a different type of leadership. We're hurting, and people are saying let's send someone to Washington who has some experience with what's going on in our daily lives."

Cegelis, who had a strong showing against Hyde in the 2004 general election with 44 percent of the vote, was once the

The 6th District



U.S. Rep. Henry Hyde

This seat is now held by Henry Hyde of Wood Dale, who has been in Congress for three decades and plans to retire at the end of his term. The district, which covers most of DuPage County, stretches into northwestern Cook County. It includes such suburbs as Addison and West Chicago with significant Latino populations, as well as the affluent white-collar towns Naperville and Oak Brook.

Peter Roskam, a state senator from Wheaton, is running unopposed on the Republican ticket.

The Democratic candidates are:

Christine Cegelis, a Rolling Meadows information technology consultant

L. Tammy Duckworth, a Hoffman Estates pilot and veteran of the Iraq war

Lindy Scott, a Wheaton College professor who directs the Center for Applied Christian Ethics

avored Democratic candidate. But odds for victory now appear to be leaning toward Duckworth — so much so that Cegelis dumped her campaign manager in favor of Kevin Spidel, who worked on U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich's staff during the Ohio Democrat's unsuccessful bid for president.

Duckworth, who lost both legs in the war in Iraq and whose story has been detailed in such publications as the *Daily Herald*, has won backing from U.S. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, and U.S. Sens. Barack Obama and Richard Durbin. She also has endorsements from powerful unions, including the AFL-CIO.

"A lot of people may know her history with the war, but this is a woman with a diverse biography from studying international relations to being published on environmental and health issues to pushing education and health care," Weinberg says. "The backing by the national party is appreciated and shows their interest, but that's matched pound for pound by the support here, in the district."

McLaughlin says, "From a moral and fiscal standpoint, Republicans here want to keep this as theirs."

Yet he won't deny some rebuilding is in order for the party at the state level. "Republicans are sick and tired of being sick and tired."

While there will be no Republican primary in the 6th District, the list of GOP candidates in the 8th is long, and the turnout March 21 could shed some light on whether the Republicans in that section of the state are energized — to put the GOP back in power or at least to bounce Bean.

The 8th District is still a GOP comfort zone, according to party officials who have spent little energy and money on state legislative races in order to support candidates in the congressional race. And any question about the district's partisan credentials, they say, was answered in 2004 when Bush, despite never setting a foot in the district or spending any advertising dollars there, pulled 56 percent of the vote. (Similarly, Bush spent no money in the 6th, but got 53 percent of the vote there.)

"Bean did a great job rallying the base and getting out there and fighting Crane on his record, but this was more a protest vote to get Crane out," says Mundelein attorney Kathy Salvi, a deep-pocketed conservative running in the 8th District's Republican primary.

The other Republican candidates in that district are state Rep. Robert Churchill, a 20-year Lake Villa Republican legislator; Barrington Hills investment banker David McSweeney, who has the backing of former U.S. Sen. Peter

Fitzgerald and former Bears Coach Mike Ditka and boasts that his business background will attract the largely fiscally conservative voters; former Lake County Board member and Highland Park city worker James Creighton Mitchell Jr.; Ken Arnold, a Gurnee businessman; and Aaron Lincoln, a Wauconda lawyer.

A seventh candidate, businesswoman and political novice Teresa Bartels, dropped out of the race in early February. She immediately threw her support to Salvi, 46, the only woman remaining in the race — a factor Salvi supporters say will boost her chances against Bean but one that has been dismissed by such candidates as McSweeney, who reportedly has the backing of dozens of party leaders and elected GOP officials.

The size of the field may suggest the party's desire to recapture what was theirs. But Roosevelt University political science professor Paul Green signals warnings for any Republican believing the legacies of Crane or Hyde carry over today.

"The old GOP guard, which has run the once mighty township organizations for years, has lost a good deal of its pep and zeal," he says. "The Democrats have found more attractive candidates in recent years, so therefore this area has become one of the most competitive regions in the state."

Bean's camp, for its part, is quick to

The 8th District



U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean

*This seat is now held by Democrat **Melissa Bean** of Barrington, the businesswoman who defeated longtime Republican U.S. Rep. Phil Crane two years ago. The northwest suburban district, which includes parts of Cook, Lake and McHenry counties, fits like a puzzle piece around the north side of the 6th District. Reaching north to Zion at the Wisconsin border, the district includes all or part of such tony suburbs as Kildeer and Long Grove and such middle-class towns as Round Lake Beach and Streamwood.*

The Republican candidates are:

Ken Arnold, a Gurnee businessman

Robert Churchill, a state representative from Lake Villa

Aaron Lincoln, a Wauconda lawyer

David McSweeney, a Barrington Hills investment banker

James Creighton Mitchell Jr., a former Lake County Board member of Lindenhurst

Kathy Salvi, a Mundelein attorney and wife of former state legislator Al Salvi

shoot down suggestions that her election was a fluke. Bean, described as conservative fiscally but socially moderate, simply resonates with the voters, they say. She wants to keep a lid on taxes and spending. She also supports abortion rights.

“Wishful thinking on their part,” is how Brian Herman, Bean’s campaign manager, describes a notion that Bean’s victory was a fluke. “The problem is the Republicans can’t explain away the fact that she connected with the voters. She’s a former business owner, she’s a mom, she reflects their values and their lives.”

Democrats point out that the six Republicans are of like mind on nearly every issue: opposed to gun control and raising taxes, and in support of the war in Iraq. And while Churchill and Mitchell have name recognition because they have held elected office, Salvi boasts not only name recognition, but a personal fortune — factors many political observers, and even Democrats prepping Bean, expect to put her over the top come primary day.

Salvi has so far loaned or donated about \$300,000 of her own money to her campaign fund. She now has about \$300,000 on hand. The national party so far has not contributed.

McSweeney, 40, has personally spent or loaned nearly \$1 million for his bid, while Churchill, 58, has spent or loaned

about \$100,000. Arnold, 49, an employee benefit consultant, has said he has invested about \$30,000, while Mitchell, 62, a water treatment plant operator, has spent \$4,000. Lincoln, 40, has not reported spending any personal cash in the race.

Jason Heffley, who is directing Salvi’s campaign, says, “Certainly, this race is about national issues, but it’s also about what’s local. And Kathy realizes that there is a real problem in Illinois with the party and she has a chance here to change that. Kathy is a real party loyalist, and she has a big hope that things will turn around here.”

Just as Democrats have played on the GOP’s troubles, noting that George Ryan has been sitting in U.S. District Court for allegedly misusing his offices as secretary of state and governor for political gain, so the Republicans are hoping to capitalize on the Democrats’ woes. The administrations of the state’s top Democrats, Mayor Richard Daley and Gov. Rod Blagojevich, are under federal investigation in separate hiring-related probes.

“They’re pointing at each other, and these will be fun races,” says Democratic political consultant Kevin Conlon. “It will be interesting, but I think Daley is getting his bounce back and people are starting to forget Blagojevich’s

troubles. It’s fading.”

But Republican strategists note that those controversies are part of the reason national pundits have eyeballed the races in the 6th and 8th as key to keeping or swinging the partisan balance in Congress.

Headlines have been made in other districts, including the west and southwest suburban 3rd, where one of incumbent Democrat Daniel Lipinski’s opponents — Chicagoan John Sullivan — is seeking an investigation into reports that Lipinski, while living out of state as a teacher and student, voted in Chicago, an allegation Lipinski denies.

But the greatest focus is squarely on the 8th and the 6th. “These elections could be a bellwether,” Conlon says.

“If we can take that race in [Hyde’s district], there could be a number of other districts across the country that are in play and then the Democrats are in the ballgame nationally. If the Democrats can succeed in a district like that, then there just has to be another dozen or so seats in the country where it could swing, and it will tell a lot about what the country is thinking.” □

Eric Ferkenhoff, a former reporter for the Chicago Tribune, is an Oak Park-based freelance writer who contributes to such publications as the Boston Globe and Time.

Over the top

Illinoisans head the national debate over money and politics

by Edward Felker

Illustration by Kathleen Riley Young

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert's January 17 appearance before the news media spoke volumes about the troubles facing the Republican majority in Congress. The traditionally camera-shy Illinoisan is vastly more comfortable working behind closed doors.

Exactly two weeks earlier, Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff pleaded guilty to federal influence-peddling and fraud charges and agreed to cooperate with prosecutors in ongoing investigations of lawmakers and congressional staff.

The plea agreement sent shock waves through the nation's capital and prompted a scramble by both parties to embrace ethics reform.

Democrats gleefully envisioned big gains this fall, possibly a takeover of the House and Senate. Meanwhile, nervous Republicans fretted over a future clouded by the indictment of U.S. Rep. Tom DeLay of Texas, the former House majority leader and Hastert's top lieutenant; the conviction of Republican U.S. Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham of California on bribery charges; and the resignation of Republican Rep. Bob Ney of Ohio, also linked by federal documents to the Abramoff scandal, as chairman of the House Administration Committee, which implements ethics reforms.

Ethics reform had been, to that point, a quixotic quest for lower-ranking lawmakers, including U.S. Sen. John McCain, an Arizona Republican.

Hastert himself was widely seen as forcing out U.S. Rep. Joel Hefley, a Republican from Colorado, as chairman of the House Ethics Committee early in 2005 for allowing censures of DeLay the year before. On this day, though, ethics reform was a top priority for Hastert, a pragmatic Republican from the north-eastern Illinois community of Plano in Kendall County — enough that he was willing to lay out his response directly to the nation and challenge his colleagues to back him.

Hastert, with his trusted ally, House Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier, a California Republican, endorsed a ban on privately paid travel, a tighter gift ban that would allow only token items, increased reporting by lobbyists and the application of campaign disclosure laws to lightly regulated outside groups known as 527s. He also endorsed doubling to two years a ban on lobbying by former lawmakers and their staffs.

Hastert was the only member of the House Republican leadership whose position was not at least verbally challenged in the run-up to the election of DeLay's replacement on February 2. (A motion to open all leadership posts save Hastert's was defeated by the conference a day earlier, but still gathered 85 votes.)

Hastert, a former House deputy majority whip whose strength lies in understanding his colleagues' wishes and fears,

accurately predicted that winning the support of fellow Republicans would not be automatic, and that he might have to bring them into line. "There is not unanimity across all these issues," Hastert said. "It's going to take some leadership and some pushing and pulling."

The moment Hastert went before the cameras was the start of what looked to become a busy year on ethics reform for the speaker and three key Democratic Illinoisans on Capitol Hill: U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, freshman U.S. Sen. Barack Obama and U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Chicago.

Durbin, the No. 2 Democratic leader in the Senate, quickly swung his communications team into gear, coordinating that caucus to talk wherever and whenever in favor of their reform initiatives. He and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada in turn deputized Obama to be their spokesman and to reach out to good government groups for ideas and support. (Durbin and Reid got campaign donations from special interest groups that included tribal clients represented by Abramoff and others. Neither has been implicated in the federal investigation of his crimes, however.)

Durbin says he and Reid expect Obama to be "the public face" of the Democratic side of the debate for several reasons. "First, he's new; second, because in the state he had a good reputation for dealing with ethics

reform; and third, because he's a very effective spokesman."

In mid-January, Obama introduced a bill requiring disclosure and votes on any new provisions added to House-Senate conference bills. Reformers say language favorable to special interests often is added secretly to appropriations and other high-priority bills and rarely is discovered before final passage.

Obama's task is to craft a more extensive proposal for Durbin and Reid by the end of March. At the outset, Obama also appeared set to add the Abramoff lobbying scandal to the Democratic election strategy of linking controversial provisions of the new energy bill, the Medicare prescription drug expansion and Medicaid cuts to the Republican majority.

And Emanuel, who, as an adviser to President Bill Clinton, felt the sting of Republican corruption accusations and an impeachment trial, wasted no time in reminding all that he and U.S. Rep. Martin Meehan, a Massachusetts Democrat, had introduced their own lobbying reform bill months before, in May of last year.

Emanuel, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the House Democrats' election wing, upped his refrain that Republicans are coming up with too little, too late and are undeniably responsible for a "culture of corruption" in Washington.

Yet for all the talk by Illinois Democrats and Republicans about meaningful reform, only one person enjoys the power to actually force legislation: Hastert. And the early signs pointed to evolution, not revolution.

On Hastert's 64th birthday, January 2, the former wrestling coach found himself in an unfamiliar position. His mentor, DeLay, was on the verge of permanently giving up his post as majority leader, an eventuality that would propel the House Republican caucus into a number of fractious leadership debates. The next day, Abramoff, in a plea deal with federal prosecutors, forced the cozy ties between members of Congress and lobbyists onto the front pages and into the nightly news. Then rebellious conservatives called for votes on the entire Republican leadership team, save



“What’s truly offensive about these scandals is that they don’t just lead to morally offensive conduct by members of Congress; they lead to morally offensive legislation that hurts hard-working Americans.”

for Hastert, and an end to DeLay’s use of hometown projects and plum assignments to keep lawmakers in line.

While loath to make headlines, Hastert nonetheless quickly announced that he will donate to charity some \$77,000 in campaign contributions from Abramoff and the Indian tribes he represented and defrauded.

President George W. Bush and scores of lawmakers who themselves took money from Abramoff clients quickly did the same.

Hastert canceled a planned vacation to huddle with Dreier over their reform package and to consult with lawmakers to address the crisis.

U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood, a Republican from Peoria who has known Hastert since his days in Springfield, says the veteran politician acquitted himself well enough in his rapid response to the Abramoff scandal — at least among the 231-member GOP caucus. “He was accessible so people could talk to him and he could figure out what the will of the [House GOP] conference is going to be,” says LaHood, who praises Hastert for knowing that he could not, despite the power of the speaker’s gavel, force the changes he sought. “You can’t be trotting things out and bringing things to the floor” without the backing of the rank-and-file.

Ron Michaelson, the former longtime executive director of the Illinois State Board of Elections and a visiting professor of political studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, credits Hastert with taking a proactive approach. “He

seems to me to be more interested in pushing ideas of his own, and showing that he’s the leader of the Republican caucus, and acting like it.”

It appeared, too, that despite the massive special interest donations to his campaign and political action committee, Hastert was not personally tarred by the lobbying scandal. Political action committees gave more than 43 percent of the \$2.6 million his personal campaign accepted in 2005, and 65 percent of the \$1.6 million donated in 2005 to his Keep Our Majority PAC.

“People see him as a genuinely decent person and a person of integrity,” says Michaelson.

U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, a Republican from Urbana, says, “As far as I can tell, I think he’s maintained a handle on it.” Says Johnson, who also was a lawmaker in Springfield with Hastert, “He hasn’t hit the panic button and [he has] maintained a pretty good balance.”

LaHood says the ethics scandal has not been easy for Hastert, who many expect to retire at the end of 2008. “This is tough work, very hard work, no doubt. This has taken a toll on him.”

Whether Hastert will be up to crafting ethics reform that pleases both his colleagues and the public remained an open question in February. The Republican House conference, in an upset, elected U.S. Rep. John Boehner of Ohio to take over for DeLay, and rejected the bid by DeLay’s protégé, Majority Whip Roy Blunt of Missouri, to move up to the leader’s job.

At the same time, opposition by some to a blanket travel ban and tighter gift ban forced Dreier to push back — until mid-February — his and Hastert’s deadline to unveil formal reform legislation. Notably, Hastert did not appear at the press conference where Dreier announced the delay in the reform plan. And at a February 3 press event he lobbed a question about it to Boehner, who declined to offer specifics or make a blanket endorsement of the speaker’s plan.

Ron Bonjean, Hastert’s spokesman, says the speaker, who believes that the public wants more congressional business out in the open, will stick to a methodical approach on the reform question.

But good government groups want action, not rhetoric. Fred Wertheimer,

president and CEO of Democracy 21, a nonpartisan group that seeks to reduce the influence of money in politics, calls the debate a “moment of truth” for every member of Congress. “What changes are you prepared to support, and what changes are you prepared to vote for?”

Obama, who is Hastert’s polar opposite when it comes to being at ease before TV cameras, said at a press conference, “What’s truly offensive about these scandals is that they don’t just lead to morally offensive conduct by members of Congress; they lead to morally offensive legislation that hurts hard-working Americans.”

The Democratic leadership has introduced a bill called the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, backed by 39 of the Senate’s 44 Democrats and by U.S. Sen. Jim Jeffords, an Independent from Vermont. Obama is seeking to expand on the bill: “I’m going to be arguing for the best possible bill to be the Democratic caucus bill.”

Durbin, for his part, indicated the Democrats intend to include public financing of campaigns as a likely provision, along with restoring the doctrine of making time for opposing political views on public airwaves.

Finally, the package probably will include some kind of limit on 527 political committees, which can raise unlimited donations for thinly disguised campaign ads against politicians.

Public campaign financing is an idea that has never won much support outside liberal circles, but it remains the Holy Grail for Democrats seeking to undermine Republicans’ historic money raising advantage.

Durbin acknowledges that the outcome of the Abramoff investigations, as it has to this point, would play a role in the success and failure of ethics reform. He calls it “likely” that more congressional figures will be snared by the ongoing Abramoff criminal probe.

“At this point, some of this is beyond our control. Abramoff, his fate, to a large extent is going to drive this debate.” □

Edward Felker is Washington, D.C., bureau chief of the Illinois-based Small Newspaper Group, whose California and Midwestern papers include The Daily Journal of Kankakee, The Dispatch of Moline and The Rock Island Argus.

Middleman

Illinois steps in to fill gaps in the new federal drug program and faces unexpected hurdles

by Bethany Carson

Glitches can be expected when 42 million people become eligible for a government-subsidized prescription drug program. So no one was surprised that there were plenty as the new national effort got under way.

Illinois officials, in fact, expected some snags as it cast an additional safety net to help the poorest seniors and disabled people pay for their drugs. Despite the best intentions, however, the state hit some unexpected snarls, too. And more knots are sure to surface as the state and federal drug programs are reshaped.

Starting January 1, the federal government expanded its Medicare program for senior Americans to include coverage of prescription drugs. Previously, government had subsidized prescription costs only through the joint federal-state Medicaid program for low-income seniors and disabled people. The new benefit, called Medicare Part D, is designed to lower health care costs by providing subsidies for prescription drug coverage through private insurers.

Meanwhile, Illinois joined more than two dozen other states in offering additional protections to ensure drugs stay affordable. The state's new assistance program, Illinois Cares Rx, was expected to pave the way for a seamless transition by helping low-income Illinoisans avoid paying drug costs out of their own pockets. The program also automatically enrolled low-income seniors in a prescription drug plan.

Yet a series of missteps in efforts to

align the state and federal programs created more problems for the very people they are designed to help.

A communications glitch, for instance, prompted federal officials to inform some 20,000 Illinois seniors they were automatically enrolled in one of the federal drug plans when they weren't.

While the state anticipated problems with the Illinois Cares Rx transition, it had to react to another potential problem for up to 10,000 low-income seniors. A delay in processing information between the state and federal governments and the insurance companies put seniors at risk of paying more for medications because their income levels were not yet entered correctly in the computer database.

To bridge the unexpected holes in service, Gov. Rod Blagojevich issued an emergency order so thousands of beneficiaries would not walk away from pharmacies without their medications.

He promised to reimburse pharmacists who filled prescriptions for customers whose information was incorrect or absent.

While some beneficiaries have gotten their drugs, far too many have not, says Sinead Riee Madigan, director of the state Senior Health Insurance Program.

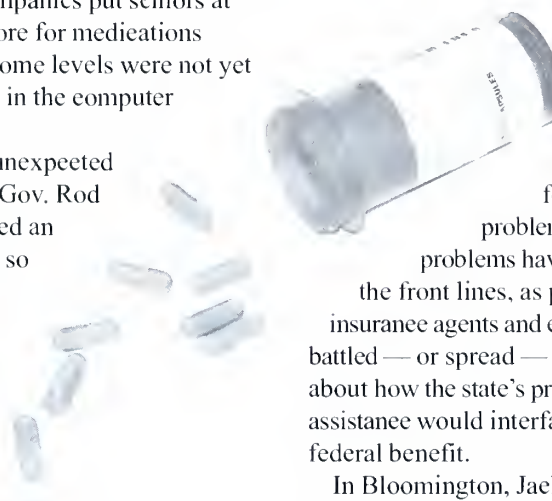
"It's certainly been a bumpy road."

As state agencies are working around the clock to smooth out the bumps on a case-by-case basis, she says the governor's emergency measure and the insurance companies' responsiveness have been integral to dissipating some of the systemic problems.

When states play middleman, though, it opens the door to miscommunication, says research professor Jack Hoadley with the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. When people are automatically enrolled, all of the paperwork needs to be in order. "It's

just one more set of computer runs, one more set of people [who] created the potential for there to be problems." Some of the problems have popped up on the front lines, as pharmacists, insurance agents and caseworkers battled — or spread — misinformation about how the state's prescription assistance would interface with the new federal benefit.

In Bloomington, Jackie Newman with the nonprofit East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging says pharmacists have said their computers aren't set up to bill under the state's contingency plans for customers who haven't been assigned to a Part D plan. "We have insurance agents selling Part D plans to people, telling them that the plan will work with Illinois Cares Rx, and it won't."



In the midst of sweeping changes in the way Americans receive their medications, state officials see Illinois Cares Rx as a long-term solution to providing equal or better health care assistance to seniors who need it most.



About 130 miles northeast of Bloomington, inaccurate information has also consumed Terri Gendel's time. She's director of benefits and advocacy for the nonprofit Suburban Area Agency on Aging in Cook County. "We knew that [it] wasn't going to go perfectly, that some people were going to get communications that weren't meant for them," she says. "State, federal [and] private plans have sent out letters that were incorrect, as well."

Gendel is gearing up for another round of problems as patients return for refills this month. "Each stage of this, we are going to find people who need help with different kinds of problems."

It's likely other adjustments will be needed at the state level. Pressure has already mounted to expand Illinois Cares Rx assistance as early as next year.

Gendel's agency works with the Make Medicare Work Coalition, a statewide network pushing the governor and lawmakers to extend the program to some 200 HIV and AIDS patients who cannot afford the out-of-pocket costs of a Medicare drug plan.

According to the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, the annual income of these patients is between \$13,000 and \$19,000, not much more than the average \$12,000 annual drug costs per person. They do get financial help through the state and federal AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), but those resources are extremely strained, says John Peller, director of state affairs for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago.

"By expanding Illinois Cares Rx to pay out-of-pocket costs for these 200 people, we can move them off ADAP, help them get their medication from Medicare Part D and basically keep the

ADAP program strong," he says.

Under the proposal, the state would spend less than \$1 million but save the AIDS program more than \$2 million. "It's helping maximize federal benefits for people in Illinois," Peller says. "It makes sure ADAP is there when people need it in the future."

The proposal sailed out of the Illinois House last month under the sponsorship of Rep. Sara Feigenholtz.

"I have a very, very large constituency depending on these drugs," says the Chicago Democrat. "I want it to work."

Initially she hesitated, she says, to tinker with an AIDS drug program that has worked well under the Illinois Department of Public Health. "We had a very smooth running program when it was just one agency," she says.

Because the AIDS drug program grew by 10 percent a year, she says, she has become convinced that expanding Illinois Cares Rx would preserve a strong assistance program for future patients.

"People depend on this program to stay alive with complex and expensive drug regimens. I'd like to remain cautiously optimistic that we'll be able to do it, and if there's a few bumps in the road, then I'm sure there will be a lot of people moving quickly to remedy that," she says. "It's worth attempting."

In the midst of sweeping changes in the way Americans receive their medications, state officials see Illinois Cares Rx as a long-term solution to providing equal or better health care assistance to seniors who need it most. In the short term, they'll need to smooth out the glitches in delivering that assistance to 300,000 Illinoisans while keeping state agencies, pharmacies and insurance companies on the same page. □

What the states are doing

Illinois is among more than two dozen states that are helping low-income seniors and people with disabilities get their medicines while the federal Medicare prescription drug program gets under way.

Some of these states' measures are permanent, some are stopgap.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich, for example, used his executive authority to allow pharmacists to bill the state after filling some prescriptions when there are glitches.

Seven other states enacted laws along similar lines, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. They are California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New

Hampshire, New York, North Dakota and Vermont.

New York and Vermont proposed covering prescriptions even if the federal government stops reimbursing the states, a move that was expected as early as mid-February. Vermont designated \$7 million to cover the gap, but expects these funds to run out this month.

California dedicated \$150 million of its general revenue funds to cover the cost of a 30-day emergency measure. New Hampshire dedicated \$500,000. The governor of Arkansas declared a public health emergency, as that state shelled out \$2.7 million to help pharmacists fill 37,000 prescriptions for customers who were incorrectly placed on the eligibility list. *Bethany Carson*

THE PRAIRIE'S DESERT WANDERER

*A native Illinoisan traveled
to the rocky Sierras and penned an environmental classic*

by Robert Kuhn McGregor

Winter may not be the most appropriate season to drive off in search of Mary Hunter Austin. The woman wrote about hot and desiccated deserts, after all.

With the temperature hovering in the teens and tendrils of snow feathering across the highway, we made our way south toward Carlinville. I was hoping to catch the faintest glimpse of Blackburn College's most noted alumnus, a woman remembered (if at all) for her images of a wilderness half a continent to the west. Virtually forgotten in the state of her birth and youth, Mary Austin once knew the blustering cold of Illinois winters just as intimately as she came to know the blazing heat of a southern California summer. In no small part, the western vision she invented was a rebellion against the Midwestern sensibilities of her upbringing. What made Mary Austin?

Blackburn College lies between Springfield and St. Louis at the eastern edge of Carlinville, an eclectic mix of old and newer buildings nestled in small and gentle hills surrounding a hollow. The campus, organized as a four-year college in 1864, has changed considerably since Mary Hunter graduated in 1888, receiving a degree in science at the age of 20. She was a local girl, one of four children born to George and Susannah Hunter on Carlinville's South Second Street. A reasonably happy childhood took an abrupt turn in 1878 when her father and



Mary Hunter Austin

a sister suddenly died. The details are sketchy, but there are enough clues to suspect that the relationship between mother and surviving daughter grew difficult. Mary did remain loyal and close for the next dozen years or so, even attending her hometown school.

The college back then was in some ways quite typical, a very small, essentially liberal arts school with roots in Eastern Christian education. Unable

to make ends meet as a theological seminary, it eventually took the shape of a four-year institution with one (then) relatively unusual characteristic: Blackburn College admitted women. Mary Hunter attended briefly, dropped out because of illness, and then tried Bloomington's Normal School for a time. Perhaps her mother called her back to Carlinville. Mary did well in her last two years at Blackburn — her classmates elected her editor of the campus literary magazine, as well as class poet. (Pretty good for a science major.)

Scant weeks after graduation, Mary Hunter dutifully moved with her mother to California. As matters turned out, this was the critical decision in the young woman's life; the deadly beauty of the Owens Valley would be her inspiration. That was difficult to see in 1888. The journey westward was a misery, the deserts of California hardly the land of opportunity her mother had envisioned. The small-college science graduate moved away from her mother's house and tried her hand at teaching but was unable to pass the school board examinations.

Completely desperate to have done with her family, in 1891, Mary took the completely normal and expected avenue of escape: She got married. The fellow was another schoolteacher, an unenterprising young man from Hawaii named Stafford Wallace Austin. The marriage

For the better part of 10 years, she spent as much time as she could hiking and watching, putting her science to work on plant and animal studies, talking to the odd folk she met in the wilds. At home, she devoted herself to the craft of writing.

was not made in heaven. Stafford had no ability to make or manage money; Mary refused to do much of any housework. Their one child, a daughter, suffered from severe mental impairment; Stafford had neglected to mention that such conditions ran in his family. Mary never forgave him.

Seeking to escape the trap she had fashioned for herself, Mary took to wandering the desert country of the Owens Valley and the Sierras. For the better part of 10 years, she spent as much time as she could hiking and watching, putting her science to work on plant and animal studies, talking to the odd folk she met in the wilds. At home, she devoted herself to the craft of writing. As early as 1888, she had sent an essay back to Carlinville for publication. *One Hundred Miles on Horseback* appeared in the January 1889 issue of *The Blackburnian*.

As the 19th century staggered to its end, the Austins moved to a new house in the tiny village of Independence, Calif. Legend has it that Mary constructed much of “the brown house under the willow,” as she called it, herself, including the rickety fireplace. Her husband moved up in the world a bit, becoming a school superintendent, but that did not matter much. Mary Austin had turned much of her attention to writing. In a year and a half, she produced an exquisite little book that she titled *The Land of Little Rain*.

Her first and greatest book was in many ways an odd one. Mary Hunter

was a product of a strait-laced, Victorian, Midwestern culture, and she wrote in just that way. She had a talent for wordsmithing, bending sentences in odd directions, reaching for the unusual word, but no one would mistake her work for the newer, more declarative style taking shape early in the 20th century. This was a voice shaped by 19th-century assumptions.

The subject matter is another issue altogether.

The structure of *The Land of Little Rain* is so delicate, so unforced, that an easy reader is apt to miss out completely. Most readers will say there is no structure, that the book is little more than a series of ephemerally connected essays, each clever enough in its own right, but adding up to little. There are several chapters devoted to natural history, the products of long walks and rides through the brush, identifying flowers, observing the habits of field mice. Interspersed with these are encounters with people — a Shawnee medicine man, an old prospector, a frontier outlaw, a village of Mexicans. The book seems a series of snapshots collected by a discerning but undisciplined artist, a scrapbook of impressions. This is where Mary Austin has us hoodwinked.

The book begins in Death Valley, the lowest point in the United States and just about the hottest. Austin paints a vivid picture of bitter country, where the unsuspecting die of thirst and the animals move only at night. The next chapters focus more intently on desert wildlife, the survival skills of mice and gophers — Austin’s “little people.” Overhead, buzzards wheel with disgusting and bone chilling grace. As dusk approaches, the coyote, Austin’s personal friend, comes forth. With perfect knowledge, with no wasted motion, the coyote hunts his meal, perfectly at home in a land of extremes.

Human beings begin to appear in her landscape, solitary men who know this arid world as the coyote knows — a mule team driver, a pocket hunter. Crazy men, drawn irresistibly to a world only crazy men could inhabit. The book moves on, up into the plateau country, the grasslands where the living is a bit less harsh. There are Indians in this country, poor tattered remnants of once

viable cultures, struggling to hold on. Austin knows too well that the Indian’s day is just about done, that cultures perfectly adapted to the wilds are giving way to outsiders such as herself, foreigners who understand the land not at all. Her particular hero seems to be an ancient and blind Indian woman, a widow who raised her son to adulthood with no help from anyone. “A man must have a woman,” Austin quotes, “but a woman who has a child will do very well.”

As the country becomes more habitable, Austin draws a picture of Jimville, a typical western town. A typical Anglo town, that is to say, filled with saloons, with greed, with ambition, with violence. “There are three hundred inhabitants in Jimville and four bars,” Austin notes, “though you are not to argue anything from that.” A murderer happens through on festival day; he buys a cushion before making a run for it. Turning from the aggression, Austin finds peace in a field of flowers at the edge of another town. The field will become a subdivision, as soon as the owner can find the investment money.

Upward. Austin leaves the doomed field of flowers for mountain meadows, mountain lakes where almost no one goes. There is a different, yet equally compelling, brand of wildlife to be found in these wildlands, home of deer and mountain sheep. Overhead stand the mountain peaks, Kearsarge and the rest of the Sierras, beckoning. The weather has gone cold. And still Austin is reaching upward, past the meadows, out beyond Kearsarge, grasping hopefully for the clouds in a Sierra sky. A journey that began in the torment of Death Valley ends in the cold beckoning of the sky itself. Mary Austin is extending, growing, reaching ever upward to the sky. She invites her readers to do the same — provided they take the time to understand her journey.

There is one last stop in *The Land of Little Rain*. People have appeared here and there in Austin’s quest — half-crazy solitaires, doomed Indians, grasping Anglos. The last of the people she meets live in the Valley of the Grape Vines — a name she translated from the Spanish. The residents are Mexicans. They are very poor; there is little work to be had, unless they leave to enter nearby mines.

Most everyone prefers to stay home and live with their families.

To Austin's amazement, the families support such decisions — it is better to be poor and be happy. She makes sure to attend the festival celebrating the Mexican Revolution. The singing and dancing are unrestrained, every possible nationality is saluted, every anthem sung. At *El Pueblo de Las Uvas*, there is no prejudice, there is no aggression. Austin has found her perfect human community. The contrast to Jimville could not be more stark.

Mary Austin published *The Land of Little Rain* in 1903. The book proved to be her ticket out of the domestic trap. Within a year, she moved to an artists' colony at Carmel, near the Monterey Peninsula. Jack London was a fellow resident. Soon she was receiving letters from H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw praising her "pragmatic, direct approach" to social problems. She found she had become an effective voice for women's suffrage, for a variety of social issues.

For the next 31 years, Mary Austin lived the life of a celebrated writer and advocate. Leaving her husband in the dust, she made her way to the literary haunts of New York, and then across the Atlantic to Europe. Eventually she found her way back to the arid Southwest that had proved her inspiration, settling in Santa Fe, N.M. She averaged roughly a book a year, along with a play or two, some short story collections, a few decent poems, and an autobiography, *Earth Horizon*. Virtually none of these books are now in print; they are difficult to find, even in California. Or in Carlinville. Mary Austin's name still lives because of just one book, the very first one she wrote.

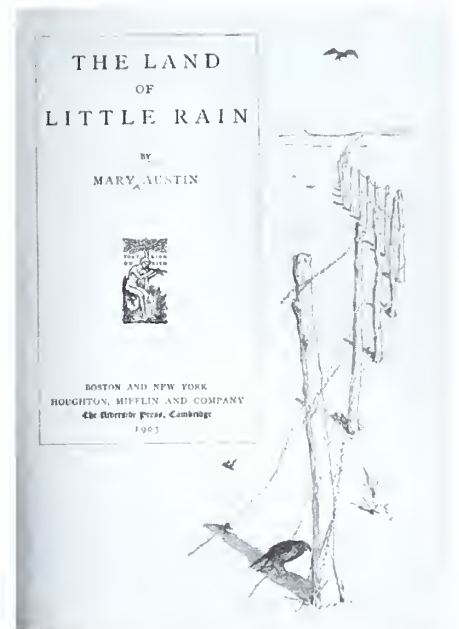
Separating Austin, the person, from that one book is pretty challenging. *The Land of Little Rain* is a critically important work, a voice for environmental values in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, one that anticipated the sly observations of Edward Abbey. Add to this the feminist pioneer characteristics — Mary Austin is one of the few female names on the list of early nature writers — and the book assumes an arresting quality. But what of Mary herself? Is she simply this book?

Contemporaries described her very carefully. Apparently, she was a little bit

intimidating, despite having short legs. She grew her hair down to her knees, and generally wound the coils around her head like a crown. Mabel Dodge Luhan, a close friend, said Mary "was the innocent uninhibited Eve all her life." Ansel Adams, another friend, saw her as a blend of scientist and mystic. Others were not so kind. Success fed a very large ego; she could be unkind in her criticisms of those around her. Most of Santa Fe's citizens kept their distance. In her late years, she turned a garden hose on reporters who got too nosy.

If Mary Austin did become something of a literary snob, she never forgot Carlinville. The archives at Blackburn College do not contain a great deal of first-person material from her, but there is enough to suggest her memories of the place remained pleasant. She visited from time to time, once voicing her displeasure that a favorite old building had disappeared. She sought help with details of her early years in Carlinville as she prepared to write her autobiography. The college wanted to grant her an honorary literary degree in 1933, after *Earth Horizon* appeared, but she wrote back requesting they postpone the award for a year. She wanted to be there in person. The degree was never bestowed; Mary Hunter Austin died in 1934.

Writing one compelling book in 31 tries may not sound like much of a batting average, but it is the difference between literary immortality and a dead reputation. As environmental consciousness and conscience has grown over the past century, the standing of Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* has grown alongside. Mary Austin wrote of the desert Southwest with a Midwesterner's vision, seeing that arid world as utterly foreign, very strange, and hauntingly appealing. Much of the book is the voice of a subtly rebellious soul at work. Austin had tried to do what was expected of her: honor her mother, find a husband, work at jobs appropriate for women. Her first book gave all of that the push. To her Anglo contemporaries, the desert was an evil world, filled with lesser peoples. Seeking escape from her domestic prison, Austin grew to love the desert, to see the lies for what they were. The result was a celebration of a harsh natural world and the peoples who had



*The title page from the original edition of Mary Hunter Austin's *The Land of Little Rain* is courtesy of the University of Virginia Library's Electronic Text Center.*

learned to live with its offerings.

So just why is Mary Hunter Austin on the long list of forgotten Illinois authors? She is remembered at Blackburn College, but you would have to hunt far and wide to find much else in Illinois honoring her memory. Why? While it is true that Illinois does not often come to mind when folks seek out environmental inspiration, the fact remains that a number of important voices found their shape in this land of corn and soybeans. John Wesley Powell. Stephen Forbes. Mary Hunter Austin. American understanding of the natural world was shaped in some part by their visions. Mary Austin found beauty in a wilderness where nearly everyone else found desolation and despair. She loved the coyotes and the little people, loved even the scavenging buzzards. She saw desolation with a searching eye. That eye took shape in smalltown Illinois, amidst prairies turned to fields.

The least Illinois can do is to give Austin's little wilderness book an honest try. Even on a cold, blustery, winter's day, when there are no buzzards soaring overhead. □

Robert Kuhn McGregor, an environmental historian at the University of Illinois at Springfield, is a frequent contributor.

U of I Board of Trustees re-elects chairman

Lawrence Eppley of Palatine was re-elected to a fourth consecutive one-year term as chairman of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees.

An attorney with the Chicago law firm of Bell, Boyd and Lloyd LLC, Eppley was first appointed to the board in 2001 by Gov. Rod Blagojevich. That term is set to expire in 2007.

The Board of Trustees governs the three campuses in the U of I system in Chicago, Springfield and Urbana-Champaign.

Fire marshal named

David Foreman, a retired captain in the Joliet Fire Department, is Gov. Rod Blagojevich's choice as the new Illinois State Fire Marshal.

Foreman, president of the Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois union for the past 18 years, was installed immediately after being named last month, but as of mid-February the Senate had yet to confirm that appointment.

Dave DeFraties, an interim fire marshal, had been on the job since fall, when J.T. Somer retired.

BIT

Betty Friedan

The Peoria native, widely regarded as the mother of modern American feminism, died on her 85th birthday, February 4.

Friedan, a founder and the first president of the National Organization for Women, sparked the movement with her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which gave voice to "the problem that has no name," an ache shared by women of her generation whose lives primarily were centered in the home.

Friedan, a leader in the unsuccessful drive for the Equal Rights Amendment, wrote several other books, including *The Second Stage*, *It Changed My Life*, and *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family*, which advocated economic justice. Cornell University, one of several colleges that employed Friedan as a scholar, described her as the "foremost spokesperson for women's rights in the world."

Lincoln museum director to leave Illinois

Richard Norton Smith, the gregarious inaugural executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, is expected to depart at the end of the month to join the faculty at George Mason University in Virginia.

Smith, a nationally known presidential scholar who also directed the foundation for the library and museum, is expected to continue research on his biography of former Vice President Nelson Rockefeller.

Illinois State Historian Tom Schwartz will fill the vacancy on an interim basis while a national search is conducted for Smith's replacement.

Smith came to Illinois in 2003 from the Robert J.

Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, which he opened two years earlier. Nationally known as a frequent commentator for C-SPAN and PBS, Smith arrived in Illinois when the library portion, which opened in October 2004, was well on its way to completion. He played a greater role at the 40,000-square-foot museum with its high-tech holographic exhibit, officially opening it in April 2005 at a ceremony that featured President George W. Bush and other political luminaries.

"A great deal of work, some of it corrective, more of it creative, has necessarily been telescoped into these crowded years," Smith wrote in a letter to Gov. Rod Blagojevich, whose office released it. "As it happens, the ALPLM is the sixth institution — the last two of them start-ups — for which I have been responsible since 1987. Having done what I was asked to do in 2003, I feel the time has come to do other things."

Smith also previously directed the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch, Iowa; the Dwight D. Eisenhower Center in Abilene, Kan.; the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and the Reagan Center for Public Affairs in Simi Valley, Calif.; and the Gerald R. Ford Museum and Library in Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor, Mich.

Smith's books include *Thomas E. Dewey and His Times*, which was a finalist for the 1983 Pulitzer Prize; *An Uncommon Man: The Triumph of Herbert Hoover*; *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation* and *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick*.

According to Blagojevich's office, the U.S. Archivist has asked Smith to take on a review that will be aimed at assessing and strengthening the nation's presidential library system.



Richard Norton Smith

Tollway authority chief steps down

Jack Hartman left his post as executive director of the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority last month to become president of a consulting company.

During Hartman's tenure, the agency almost doubled use of the electronic I-PASS toll collection system to 75 percent, increased rates for nonusers and began a \$5.3 billion program to reduce congestion. Sections of I-88 and I-294 were rebuilt and widened through that ongoing program.

Hartman joined the agency three years ago after working as an executive vice president at the Chicago Transit Authority and as a deputy commissioner for the Chicago Department of Aviation.

Hartman's new employer, the RISE Group LLC, which has bases in Chicago and Anchorage, Alaska, consults in the areas of program management, technical services and strategy.

As of mid-February, Blagojevich had yet to name a replacement.

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

James Walker



James Walker

The former Southern Illinois University president died February 5. He was 64.

Walker, who became the first African American to head the 35,000-student SIU system when he arrived in 2000, retired at the end of last year. He had been on medical leave since September, battling cancer.

"As I have often said, President Walker will be remembered most as a man who provided stable and experienced leadership to the SIU system at a critical point in our history," current SIU President Glenn Poshard stated in a release. "He was a caring and decent man who accomplished a great deal for Southern Illinois University through his positive outlook on life and his wonderful sense of humor."

Walker, who had been president of Middle Tennessee State University for a decade, succeeded **Ted Sanders** at SIU.

Professor's text inspires off-Broadway show

Carla Montgomery, a geology professor and acting associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, penned a geology textbook that is credited with inspiring a New York stage production: *(w)HOLE*. The title is an acronym for the (whole) history of life on earth.

The Brooklyn-based LAVA troupe choreographed the formation of volcanos and other geological processes as dances, acrobatic feats and trapeze acts. The production was scheduled for a seven-week run, opening in January.

Turns out, *Physical Geology*, which Montgomery wrote in 1987, was the text in a course LAVA's artistic director took about decade ago at Brooklyn College.

Chicago scholar tapped for Federal Reserve

Randall Kroszner, an economics professor at the University of Chicago's Graduate School of Business, is one of President George W. Bush's nominees to fill vacancies on the Federal Reserve's seven-member Board of Governors.

Kroszner, who specializes in international and domestic banking and regulation of financial institutions, served on Bush's Council of Economic Advisers from 2001-2003. He and fellow nominee **Kevin Warsh**, a special assistant to the president for economic policy, would fill vacancies created by **Ben Bernanke's** move to the Reserve's chairmanship and the summer resignation of **Edward Gramlich**. Bernanke was Bush's pick to replace **Alan Greenspan**, who retired after nearly two decades. The 14-year term Kroszner was nominated to fill expires in 2008.

Kroszner, whose nomination is subject to U.S. Senate approval, directs the George J. Stigler Center for the Study of the Economy and the State.



Randall Kroszner

Taxpayer federation selects new president

J. Thomas Johnson of Park Ridge becomes Taxpayers' Federation of Illinois president in April. He replaces **Tim Bramlet**, who now heads the Illinois Beverage Association. Johnson, an executive with the KPMG LLP firm, was state revenue director from 1980-87.

New state rep picked

Democrat **Esther Golar** of Chicago was sworn in to fill the vacancy created by the conviction of former 6th District state Rep. **Patricia Bailey**.



State Rep. Esther Golar

Bailey falsely claimed to live in the district on election filing documents, which led to her conviction on forgery and perjury charges. She was sentenced to probation.

Local Democratic leaders elected Golar to fill the vacancy. Golar had been a member of the Robert Fulton Elementary Local School Council and the board of directors of the nonprofit Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago.

State Police officers charged with federal weapons violations

Greg Mugge, **John Yard** and **James Vest** — a trio of State Police troopers — face illegal firearm possession charges because federal prosecutors contend they had machine guns in their homes.

Jerseyville resident Mugge is a senior master trooper based in Litchfield, while Sgt. Vest of O'Fallon and Special Agent Yard work in Collinsville. Yard, a Collinsville resident, is a former member of the FBI's Fairview Heights-based Corruption Task Force.

The three were indicted in the East St. Louis Division of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Illinois. All three pleaded innocent, and each of them had a preliminary April 3 trial date.

"No one is above the law," said U.S. Attorney **Edward McNally** of the southern district of Illinois in announcing the indictments. "If the United States obtains sufficient evidence that the law has been violated — whether by a law enforcement officer, any other public official or a private person — they will be prosecuted, and justice administered fairly."

If convicted, they face a maximum penalty of 10 years and a \$250,000 fine.



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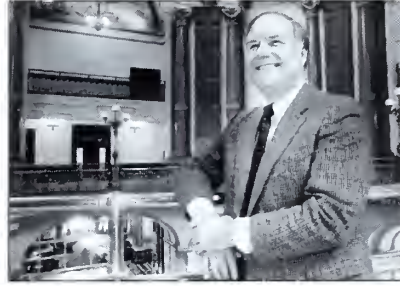


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Charles N. Wheeler III



The governor's budget is a political statement about his vision and campaign appeal

by Charles N. Wheeler III

A couple of weeks ago, Gov. Rod Blagojevich formally announced what most folks thought has been pretty apparent since the day he took office — he is seeking another term as the state's chief executive.

The governor's statewide flyaround followed by a few days his budget address to a joint session of the Illinois legislature, in which he unveiled a \$55.3 billion spending plan for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

For most Illinois families, a budget is a financial planning tool, a blueprint for managing income and outgo to keep the household afloat. For governors, though, a budget is also a political statement, a message to voters about one's vision for the state, and perhaps most importantly, one's appeal as a candidate.

Thus, as political art, Blagojevich's fourth budget message was first-rate, and a splendid warm-up for his re-election trek.

Portraying himself as the guy who bailed Illinois out of the fiscal mess left by former Gov. George Ryan and his GOP predecessors, Blagojevich sounded a familiar refrain of the last three years — more money for schools, more health care for Illinoisans, more jobs and less crime, all without raising income or sales taxes.

And he called on lawmakers to build on that record in the coming budget year by embracing preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds, approving tax

Thus, as political art, Blagojevich's fourth budget message was first-rate, and a splendid warmup for his re-election trek.

credits for college tuition, creating new programs to train more nurses and forensic scientists, and funding more state troopers.

In all, the governor called for \$25.7 billion in general funds spending, an increase of almost \$1.4 billion, including \$400 million more for K-12 education, an additional \$423 million for health care, including his plan to provide coverage for all Illinois youngsters, and \$339 million more for pension systems.

His fellow Democrats cheered, even giving their man a standing ovation. Republicans were less enthused, responding at times with groans, jeers and calls to "pay the bills!" Beyond such predictable partisan reaction, though, the governor's proposals deserve closer scrutiny if they're to be taken as something more than campaign rhetoric.

Perhaps a good place to start is whether Blagojevich has balanced the budget. The traditional measure of a balanced budget has been a simple mathematical comparison between the amount of

money in the state's checkbook account at the end of a fiscal year and the amount of outstanding bills from that fiscal year yet to be paid. If there's more than enough to pay the bills, it's a surplus; if not, it's a deficit.

By that yardstick, fiscal year 2007 would be the fourth year in a row in which Blagojevich has posted a budgetary deficit. His budget office is projecting \$525 million in the bank on June 30, 2007, to cover \$900 million of bills, a \$375 million shortfall. Still, that would be the best he's done; last year, for example, the deficit was \$474 million.

Republicans argue the deficit is much greater — perhaps \$3 billion to \$4 billion — if pension underfunding and delayed Medicaid payments to health care providers are counted, and they're probably correct.

Indeed, sensitive to GOP complaints about the Democrats' decision to slash pension funding by \$2.3 billion over two years, the governor stressed several times that state retirement systems are on sounder financial footing now than they were when he took office.

In fact, the retirement kitties in 2003 held less than half the money they would need to pay benefits already earned and guaranteed by the state Constitution. By 2005, the funding level exceeded 60 percent, thanks in large part to the \$10 billion pension bond sale Blagojevich engineered in his first year.

By opting to use pension money for

other worthy causes in both the current and the coming fiscal years, however, the funding level will sink to less than 58 percent by 2008, while the amount owed the systems stands at \$38 billion.

And to keep the funding level at 57 percent will require an additional \$2 billion contribution by 2010, for a total of \$3.4 billion, according to actuarial projections for the pension systems.

Republicans also complained about how Blagojevich planned to pay for the host of other new and expanded programs stuffed into the budget. Universal state-subsidized preschool, for example, carries a projected first-year cost of \$45 million, which presumably will be part of the \$400 million in new money for K-12 education, as would a \$10 million pilot program to hire new teachers to reduce class size for kindergarten through 3rd grade in selected schools. The money, Blagojevich said, would come mostly from new business taxes — “closing corporate loopholes” in the governor’s terms — and tapping other, earmarked state accounts.

Similarly, scholarship money for

His fellow Democrats cheered, even giving their man a standing ovation. Republicans were less enthused, responding at times with groans, jeers and calls to “pay the bills!”

nursing school programs and forensic training would be part of a \$40 million boost for higher education — after three years of budget cuts — bankrolled by the proposed sale to private lenders of some \$3.5 billion in student loans the state now holds. Republicans complained the deal would bring in only a fraction of the loans’ total worth, but university presidents eagerly endorsed the plan, perhaps seeing it as their only chance for a few dollars more.

Despite their misgivings, Republicans seemed resigned to the inevitable — the Democratic majorities in the Senate and

the House would pass the governor’s budget pretty much exactly as he wished, just as they did last year, with no GOP help.

The only possible leverage Republican lawmakers have is on the governor’s proposed \$3.2 billion, bond-financed construction program, which would require GOP votes to reach the three-fifths majorities needed to authorize borrowing. Here, too, Republican leaders say they want to know how the governor will repay the money before they’ll go along with the program.

Still, Blagojevich appears to be in a no-lose situation. If he can pick off a handful of GOP lawmakers in each chamber, he gets the bonds and the attendant project announcements. If not, he can always campaign against hard-line Republican partisans who refused to help bring 230,000 new jobs to Illinois.

So as budgets go, the governor’s FY2007 proposal is a great political statement. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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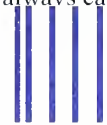
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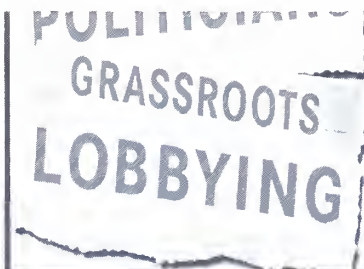
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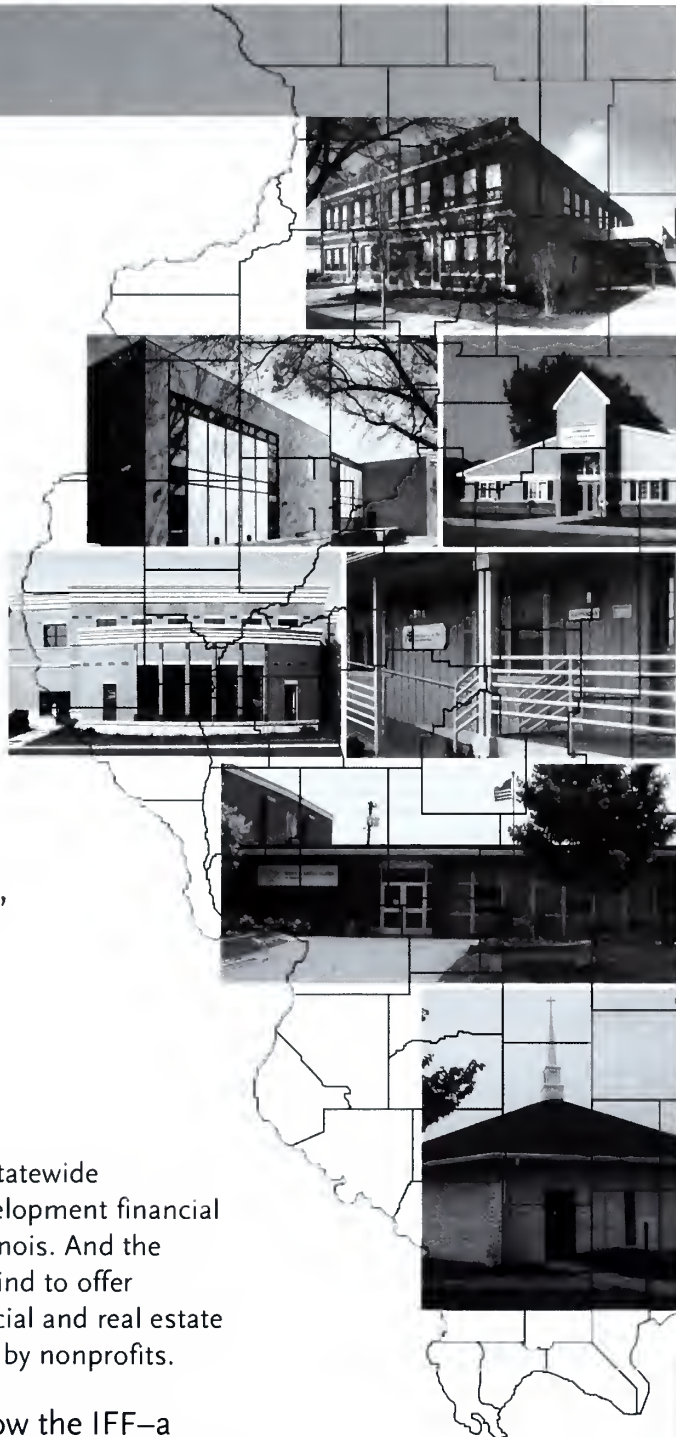
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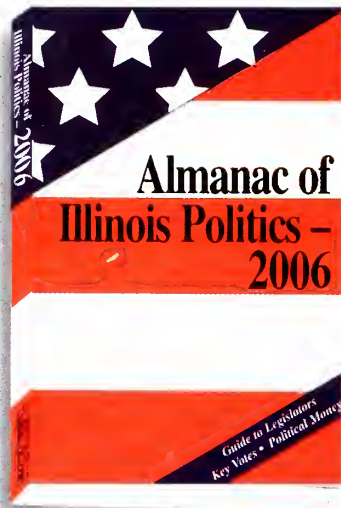
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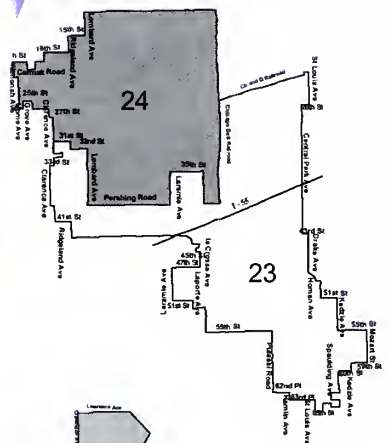
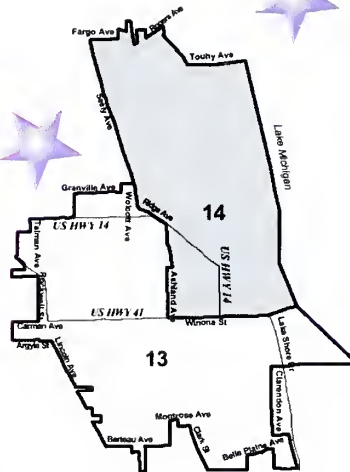
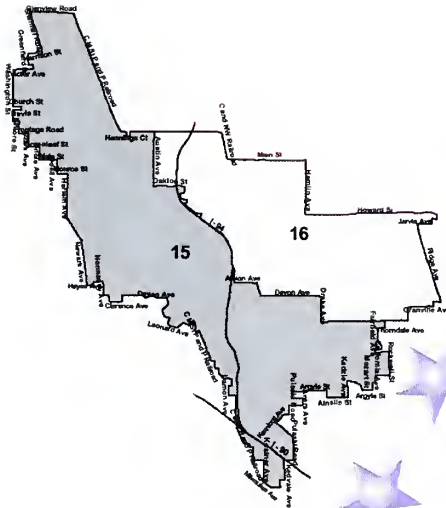
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